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***Transferring principles: The role of physical consciousness in Butoh  
and its application within contemporary performance praxis.***

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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December 2009**

## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the role of physical consciousness in contemporary performance training praxis, outlining my position as a performance maker involved in a range of dance and theatre training disciplines, with particular recourse to the Japanese contemporary movement expression of Butoh. The term praxis refers to a set of practical aims put forward throughout the writing, as well as referencing an ethos of self governed practice within independent movement training and performance. The arguments posed draw from a personal critical understanding based on different training programs with European and Japanese butoh artists. Through evolving my performance training praxis towards certain choreographic as well as metapractical aims, I seek to challenge the notion of 'performance mastery'- a term which, within a traditional western performance context might imply control, virtuosity and technical discipline - in response to an anti-aesthetical approach to dance, as found in what I argue to be the dysfunctional, non-kinetic body of the butoh dancer.

In making explicit the connections between studio practice, anatomical and somatic investigation and outdoor environmental exploration, I examine the role of 'physical consciousness' in butoh as a contemporary movement approach which might shift current established discourses surrounding western theatrical dance training towards an open investigation of movement practice and repertoire through transdisciplinary approaches which interface the languages of ecology, geology and cartography. Physical consciousness refers to an internal dialogue held by the butoh dancer between a range of visual images, or actual experiences gained through direct contact with specific environments, and his or her means of physicalising these images and experiences in movement. Thus, physical consciousness requires the butoh dancer to constantly engage in a double exposure between the internal image, as fed through language, and those external forms presented.

The experiential mode of practice is prioritised throughout as the writing seeks to stabilise empiricist notions of practice as contingent on both first hand and collated accounts of perceptual mechanisms, while research methods used here draw on social science practices with the aim of producing an embedded critique of physical

consciousness. Within my dance research and production methods, physical consciousness articulates an internal awareness of the body's movement potential which questions the how rather than the why or where of the dancer's movement capabilities, minimising the distance between internal awareness and aesthetic form, between the dancer and the dance.

## **Acknowledgements**

*I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people who have helped me with this thesis. My sincerest gratitude to the Dance Department at Middlesex University and, in particular, my supervisor Dr. Susan Melrose and my additional supervisor Dr. Janet O'Shea for their continued support. I would like also to thank my parents and my partner Mark for their encouragement.*

## **Note on Names**

*For Japanese names I have chosen the English convention of retaining the familiar form of the first name followed by the surname.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This PhD project is based on interdisciplinary practice and research, proposing a reflective inquiry in which research questions are asked through range of creative practices. These practices are facilitated through collaborative dialogue in the forms of pedagogic activities, choreographic research, solo performance-making strategies and the creation and dissemination of photographic and film materials, all of which are referenced throughout. As such, this research project is not steered by any singular production-based outcome that remains consistent throughout the process. Instead, it reflects a gradual evolution which echoes my continuing development as an independent dance artist and self-reflective researcher, advocating a double research undertaking into *butoh*<sup>1</sup> and performance-making, by proposing a balance between a literature-based and a performance-practice based inquiry.

The current writing project is structured to reflect my role within a range of learning and teaching areas, including as student, facilitator, pedagogue, collaborator and researcher. Though not necessarily chronological, I have identified these roles from the outset of each section, while collaborative or shared sets of knowledge are distinguished from my independent performance research. Thus, while some of the research undertaken through practical inquiry involves the participation and collaboration of other artists, these instances are clearly named, and established roles are identified, while my individual contribution to the particular project is carefully articulated throughout. Where the above might indicate a chronological development from initial dance training towards performance production and dissemination, the separate modes of writing and documentation used to cite these particular lines of inquiry should operate discursively and will be unpacked in relation to pre-established modes of thoughts and exemplary practices, thus proposing a metadiscourse of practice which remains in the speculative mode.

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<sup>1</sup> Initially identified in the work of avant-garde dancer and artist, Tatsumi Hijikata and his contemporary, Kazuo Ohno, *butoh* is an experimental dance performance expression that emerged in Japan in the early 1950s and can be described as both a philosophy and movement expression in that it can be argued to identify a set of principles that govern the moving body in performance.

The thesis is structured to represent both an embedded perspective of dance, citing a range of training methods and their application and distillation within my choreographic practice, and a critical evaluative approach. Research and writing practices undertaken here subscribe to a holistic ethos of dance pedagogy, in which the experiential learning mode might assimilate the following separate yet interrelated positions of receptive, interpretative and applicative modes of engagement. As such, I examine the work of several practitioners through a critical inquiry into their distinct disciplinary methods and their application within both formal and informal dance and performing arts pedagogy. This inquiry includes attention to mime technique, contemporary dance improvisation, Body Weather<sup>2</sup> and butoh and will consider the following aspects:

- Reception: appropriation of dance training mechanisms and synthesis of form.
- Distillation of principles: assimilation through subjective perceptual experience.
- Experimentation: facilitated shared collaborative inquiry involving separate modes of documentation and dissemination.
- Application within individualised choreographic practice.

Chapters One and Three consider a range of butoh productions and their relationship to critical writings, while developing a wider investigation of historic relations held between dance and writing. Chapters Two and Four provide an embedded critique, respectively applying an analysis of my own training experiences and their further distillation through independent choreographic research methods. As such, the structure of the thesis reflects an ethos of integrated research inquiry in providing a holistic treatment of butoh that offers the reader both an internalised and embedded perspective and also an externalised, analytical one. Such an approach echoes that of my own engagement both inside and outside of my subject of study. In addition, questions concerning the relationship between dance and writing raised throughout the current writing project, aim to highlight some of the ways in which forms of dance writing have evolved over the past three decades to embrace those often hidden processes behind the making of dance work, reflecting a changing concern within dance, and indeed contemporary arts praxis as a whole, on artistic process rather than product. One of the

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<sup>2</sup> Body Weather is a holistic movement practice which shares a cultural lineage with butoh and was initiated by Japanese Butoh dancer Min Tanaka with his dance company Mai Juku, whom together founded the Body Weather Farm in a mountainous district outside Tokyo in the 1970's.



main motivations for an investigation into the training methods and performance processes pertinent to butoh dance is the fact that the majority of western spectator accounts of butoh lead too easily toward mystification and misappropriation of this movement expression, in which butoh's visual presentation in performance can be argued to have overshadowed its formation through training processes. Thus, this project will provide the necessary links and cross illuminations between what is cited here as practice-led research inquiry and theoretical research, with the aim of developing a form of writing that extends directly from the perceptual, embodied experiences of butoh dance, to produce a rigorous and illuminated research document of performance practice.

### **Terms of engagement**

My area of investigation is firmly located in the Japanese movement expression of butoh. Butoh is presented here as a performing entity containing its own existential movement aesthetic as well as reflecting social, political and cultural debates which surround the body in performance. For the purposes of this project, an inquiry into butoh as a dance training approach will draw upon the practices of both Japanese and non-Japanese butoh dancers who can be said to constitute a second generation of performers and teachers within this dance expression, referencing, in particular, my two year training engagement with Swedish butoh dancer and teacher, Su-En. Historically and culturally, this second generation can be defined as emerging post Hijikata's death in 1986, incorporating both Japanese butoh artists who have moved to Europe and America, and also Western dance practitioners who have lived and studied in Japan.

The interdisciplinary theoretical debates deployed here include those from film studies, contemporary visual art theory and social and ethnographic discourse, housed in contemporary critical performance theory. In particular, dance theorist Andre Lepecki (2006) provides a list of critical elements surrounding contemporary dance performance, to include: 'solipsism, stillness, the linguistic materiality of the body, the toppling of the vertical plane of representations, the stumble on the racist terrain, the proposition of a politics of the ground, and a critique of the melancholic drive at the

heart of choreography.’<sup>3</sup> Lepecki’s propositions will be interrogated throughout this project and examined in relation to the following areas:

- the self-advocating dancer and the role of agency within dance training
- an examination of perceptual modes of engagement in butoh
- an inquiry into historic relations between dance and writing
- a critique on the ‘visceral gaze’<sup>4</sup> by way of developing an interrogation of the role of spectatorship in dance
- a critique of authenticity and appropriation of a butoh aesthetic

I define butoh as a contemporary movement expression which has evolved its own series of methodologies and techniques focused on the presentation of the moving, articulate, expressive body in performance, and also as a specific practice-grounded mode of contemporary performance enquiry which tends to cross established areas. Dance as a term and concept is used critically in this study to encompass western theatrical dance, representing a set of assumptions regarding the physical, trained body in performance; the notion will be further critiqued in relation to definitions of virtuosity and aesthetics put forward by others in butoh. The terms of reference, in other words, are based on an ongoing interrogation of the Japanese movement expression of butoh, and in particular, a study of the role of physical consciousness within butoh training and performance. For the purpose of this writing, the term ‘consciousness’ is defined, in the context of dance, as a physiological inquiry into the internal expression of the butoh performer, drawing from Valery’s description of Isadora Duncan’s dance as ‘a kind of *inner life*, allowing that psychological term a new meaning in which physiology is dominant’<sup>5</sup>. Consciousness is also tied to Abrahms’ concept of expressionism as that which ‘signifies the internal made external.’<sup>6</sup> Developing a further definition of perceptual consciousness<sup>7</sup> requires a phenomenological turn in examining

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<sup>3</sup> Lepecki, A., *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 4.

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘visceral gaze’ is adopted from cultural theorist Brian Massumi and advocates a reflexive viewing position, in relation to spectator discourses surrounding dance. See Massumi, B. *Parables for the Virtual - Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 46-68.

<sup>5</sup> For further critique on the role of consciousness in dance see Valery P., ‘Philosophy of the Dance’ in *Aesthetics* trans. Mannheim, R. (New York: Pantheon, 1964), 197-211. Cited in Franko, M. *Dancing Modernism Performing Politics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Abrahms, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) Cited in Franko (1995), x.

<sup>7</sup> In citing the term perceptual consciousness in relation to psychophysical processes, I acknowledge the considerable amount of published research which reflects recent developments within dance scholarship to do with an interrogation of cognitive processes surrounding dance making. Notable recent examples of

the cultivation of the body within butoh training toward a particular movement sensibility which prioritises the role of consciousness within the choreographic process. A key influence of this dance expression and philosophy in my performance research is the belief that butoh challenges the platonic ideals upheld by traditional nineteenth century European ballet, where the aesthetic ideal of ballet can be said to impose itself on the form of the dance. Conversely, butoh can be said to take its ideas from forms created out of the direct participation of the butoh dancer in a range of organic or elemental images which evolve a particular dance sensibility to which I ascribe the term 'physical consciousness'. The particular relationship of language and movement in butoh requires the dancer to physicalise verbal imagery through the articulation of a series of movement translations. Here, the application of language in butoh operates within a transformative process governing word, image, sensation, movement and affect. Unlike the aesthetic ideals subscribed to within western European ballet forms<sup>8</sup>, the movement forms produced within butoh performance are the results of a fluid translation between physical and aesthetic consciousness.

The term physical consciousness refers to an internal dialogue between the dancer and a range of visual images and stimuli gained through her direct contact with specific environments, and her subsequent means of physicalising these experiences in movement. This requires the dancer to constantly engage in a double exposure between the internal image as fed through language, and those external movement forms presented. Japanese theatre director and teacher, Tadashi Suzuki describes how "(p)hysical consciousness in butoh lies in a fundamental recognition of the relationship of the body to gravity."<sup>9</sup> Both Suzuki and Japanese butoh dancer Kazuo Ohno talk about their work as a struggle against gravity, by way of contending with the body as living material. Fraleigh (2006) suggests that both Hijikata and Ohno 'invert consciousness'<sup>10</sup>, further asserting that their dance research is firmly rooted within a 'Japanese phenomenology'<sup>11</sup>. This notion will be further examined in relation to western phenomenological models concerning the mind/body relationship, as presented in the

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collaborative projects in dance and cognitive processes within the sciences include 'The Choreography and Cognition Project', a collaborative research program between choreographer Wayne McGregor and Cambridge University Department of Neuroscience, 2003 ([www.choreocog.net](http://www.choreocog.net)).

<sup>8</sup> For fuller guidance see Foster, S. 'The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe' in *Corporealities* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Suzuki, T *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki* trans Thomas Rimer. (Theatre Communications Group, New York 1986)

<sup>10</sup> Fraleigh, S. *Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 72.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid: 74

writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>12</sup> and will posit a phenomenological turn in further defining the cultivation of the body in butoh training toward a particular movement sensibility which involves both a conscious internalised process and a heightened awareness of the body's movement capabilities.

Finally, in developing my performance training praxis towards certain choreographic as well as metapractical outcomes, I seek to question the notion of 'performance mastery' in a traditional western performance context as a term that might imply control, virtuosity and technical discipline, as opposed to an anti-aesthetical approach to dance found within what I argue to be the dysfunctional, non-kinetic body of the butoh dancer. To this end, I employ the term 'physical synaesthesia'<sup>13</sup> to describe a particular physiological approach to dance, influenced by Hijikata's philosophy of the 'objective body'<sup>14</sup>, which is based on the deliberate mingling of the dancer's movement sensibilities. While synaesthesia is a term which has been adopted in several analytical writings on the arts, 'physical synaesthesia' is employed here to refer to a deliberate objectification and stratification of the body, so as to disrupt and fragment the kinetic motion of lyrical dance.

## **Practice-led Research**

Documentation plays a key role in the ongoing dialogue between written document and practical inquiry. For the present purpose, I adopt the notion of 'exchange' as the basis for an investigation into the various modes of production, dissemination and documentation that underpin my work as an independent performance maker. Within such an exchange the research process takes the form of a dialogue between practical research undertaken in the form of workshops and performance production, and evolving writing practices. The active process of recording or documenting the research subject implies a necessary differentiation between discoveries taking place and the retrospective act of writing about these discoveries. However, my research is predicated on a consciousness of the inherent problems of shifting between different registers as

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<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology of Perception*. trans. Smith, C. (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1969), 206.

<sup>13</sup> For more on synaesthesia see Richard E. Cytowic *The Man Who Tasted Shapes* (Abacus Press, New York, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> 'Tatsumi Hijikata and the origins of butoh' in Hoffman, E. Holborn, M. Mishima, M. Hijikata, T. O'More, H. (eds) *Butoh - Dance of the Dark Soul*, (New York: Aperture, 1987), 16.

the implementation of my research inquiry acquires a different dynamic where it questions '[....] the basis of knowledge centered constructive and creative practice in a relational rather than a performative idiom.'<sup>15</sup>

Knorr Cetina's (1999) critique of practice-centred knowledge systems offers a useful description here of 'practice' as that which is 'defined by a lack of completeness of being and also a non-identity within (itself)',<sup>16</sup> where she describes practice as constituting its own methodology, terms, reflexivity and conditions pertinent to a body of research, or an epistemic culture. Knorr Cetina further differentiates between object and subject in the area of research 'whereby research creates a dissociation between self and work object'<sup>17</sup>. These considerations are applied here to an understanding of those temporal conditions present while structuring choreographic and dance production processes through studio- and site-based exploration. Here, the realisation of certain practical research methods outlined in Chapter Four, must contend with a time lapse to allow for documentation and further theoretical analysis to occur. Theodore Schatzki (2002) in his debate on the relationship between practice and theory suggests that:

Most thinkers who theorize practices conceive of them, minimally, as arrays of activity. Not only, however, do their conceptions of activity and what connects activities vary, but some theorists define practices as the skills, or tacit knowledges and presuppositions, that underpin activities.<sup>18</sup>

If we take practice, in Schatzki's terms, as that which underpins activity, then the act of writing must also intervene in that activity by attempting to create an interface between practice and theory. Where the means of identifying and articulating experiential learning modes occur through written and visual documentation processes, the research methods undertaken here can be described as imitating empirical notions of knowledge practices where such processes are non-conclusive and contain unstable outcomes. Here, Anna Pakes (2003) provides a useful illustration of the increasing necessity within practice as research to evolve its own methodology, terms, reflexivity and conditions pertinent to a body of research, or a holistic, epistemic culture:

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<sup>15</sup> Knorr-Cetina, K. *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences make Knowledge* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 176.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid: 176

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Schatzki, T. 'Introduction' in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (ed.) Schatzki, T. et al. Taylor and Francis Books Ltd (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

Philosophies of practical knowledge vary (and are in some cases unclear) in how they characterise the precise relation between such knowledge and practical reasoning processes: the latter appear as either the mechanisms whereby the knowledge is produced, the manifestation of the knowledge's exercise or the logic articulable after the fact of action which endorses its epistemological claims.<sup>19</sup>

Pakes further characterises the role of written documentation within PaR (Practice as Research) as interventionist, raising questions regarding the interrelationship of both processes, considering whether the practice itself or the reflection upon it embodies the knowledge that artistic action produces: 'A related difficulty is also crucial to this discussion. This is an issue which arises when philosophical ideas elaborated to explain everyday decision-making and action are transposed to the highly specialised contexts of artistic action and PaR.'<sup>20</sup> However, as she suggests of the multiplicitous nature of a practice as research-led inquiry:

PaR's epistemological value derives from the combination of clearly articulated intentions, documentation of process, presentation of the artefact and reflection back on this object's relation to the initial questions and the broader artworld context. The artefact itself, then, becomes just one element in this bigger picture, a vehicle in the generation of knowledge rather than the only or main site of that knowledge's embodiment. The epistemological or cognitive value of the art object as such dissolves in its reframing as a piece of the artistic action.<sup>21</sup>

For the purposes of this research, the retrospective analysis of those creative and performance processes surrounding a range of solo dance productions, training workshops and collaborative projects under consideration in the following sections, requires that the resulting debates must account for a certain instantiation in developing a theory of dance based on individual research purposes. However, in the case of collaborative or shared sets of knowledge, the analysis or theoretical interrogation of one discipline by means of another must be treated with some caution. Cultural theorist Brian Massumi notes of the exchange of concepts within different knowledge practices:

If you apply a concept or system of connection between concepts, it is the material you apply it to that undergoes change, much more markedly than do the concepts. The change is imposed upon the

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<sup>19</sup> Pakes, A. *Art as Action or Art as Object? The Embodiment of Knowledge in Practice as Research*, Working Papers in Art & Design, 2003. Accessed online at : <http://www.herts.ac.uk/artdes1/research/papers/wpades/vol3/apabs.html> (no page number available)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

material by the concept's systematicity and constitutes a becoming homologous of the material to the system.<sup>22</sup>

The decision to extend the experiential process of learning a new movement language and philosophy onto paper comes about from the conviction that to write about dance is to automatically occupy a space which might otherwise contain movement. The scene of writing that I am attempting to enter, must also contain those threads of experience that are metaphorically 'written on' the performer's body; as the confinement of one exists in order to allow for memory to replace the primary experience of movement. This research project, then, advocates a need for a new approach to dance writing in which the onus remains on the primary experience of dance as a kind of performance mastery, its execution might occur through the professional crafting of a live production event, or through choreographic research processes, rather than on the secondary legislative theories of dance analysis found in the majority of contemporary performance critical theory, thus subscribing to performance studies writer Andre Lepecki's claim:

From a symptom of aesthetic inferiority that must be "corrected", dance's self-erasure has recently been reformulated as a powerful trope for new theoretical, as well as performative, interventions in dance, and in writings on dance, beyond the documental tradition.<sup>23</sup>

Lepecki's assertion regarding dance's disposal towards erasure is contested in Chapter One where I propose a theory of the self inscribing act of choreography as that which challenges the widely worn trope of ephemerality in dance. A study of objectual relations must look to Bourdieu's concept of 'field' (cited in Morris 2007) as that of the 'dynamic space of objective relationships among positions, which can only be understood by viewing the agents occupying each position in relation to all the others.'

<sup>24</sup> In Bourdieu's own words:

The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less "sensible" and "reasonable". The part of practices which remains obscure in the eyes of their own producers is the aspect by which they are objectively adjusted to other practices and to the

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<sup>22</sup> Massumi, B. 'Introduction' in *Movement, Sensation, Affect: Parables for the Virtual* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002)

<sup>23</sup> Lepecki, A., 'Exhausting Dance; Themes for a Politics of Movement' in *Live Art and Performance* (UK: Tate Publications, 2004), 131.

<sup>24</sup> Morris, G. 'Bourdieu, the Body and Graham's Post War Dance' in *Dance Research* Vol. 19 (2), Winter 2001: 52-82.

structures of which the principle of their own production is itself the product.<sup>25</sup>

While Chapter Two deals explicitly with a distillation of principles pertaining to different eastern and western dance training practices, Chapter Four, *Sentient Bodies*, employs distinct choreographic terms towards the production of independent dance performance work, supporting Bourdieu's claim regarding the relation between principle and production in practice. In positioning the writing across different time frames, the practical research methods outlined below can be seen to operate via individual agency by creating diversions and interventions as well as harnessing those research imperatives outlined at the start of each practice component, thus enabling an auto-reflexive inquiry between the two locations of learning, processing and applying new dance languages, and describing or documenting these experiences in writing. Writing in the speculative mode allows for the issue of timing to be further considered in relation to emergent arts practices, as Pakes elsewhere questions:

Is new knowledge generated in the process of making, and then made manifest and shared through the verbal reflection on that process? Or do the artistic outcomes of that process – the artefacts created – have epistemological primacy as the embodiment of new insight?<sup>26</sup>

Just as the actively engaged body in training might be seen to participate in the primary experience of shaping a physical memory, the act of writing the experience of dance provides a kind of map onto which those tools of experience might be drafted, to produce an embedded consciousness. Where the act of movement is transplanted onto the act of writing, actively, the writing is being generated into existence. Furthermore, where the research actions are steered by physical inquiry rather than writing, the critical act of intervention here provides another present tense activity: I write myself into the experience.

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<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu, P. (originally published Librairie Droz, 1972) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. (trans.) Nice, R. (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Pakes, A. 'Original Embodied Knowledge: The Epistemology of the New in Dance Practice as Research' in *Research in Dance Education*, Vol. 4(2), 2003: 127-149.



## Thesis Outline

Chapter One, entitled *Writing Dance*, explores the primacy of the image in butoh, looking at the relationship of the word and movement through the use of imagery in butoh dance, in particular in relation to *butoh-fu*. Sondra Horton Fraleigh (1996) defines *butoh-fu* as follows:

*Butoh-fu* can be described from various stand points: the dancer's embodiment of the image, the surrealist construction of the image, the collage relationship of poetic text to pencil marks and visual art, as visualizations exploring imagination, and as notation for performance and historical preservation of choreography.<sup>27</sup>

Fraleigh's description of butoh-fu below further supports an alternative definition to those dance writing forms under discussion here by encompassing the various forms of visual, scriptural and metaphoric description:

As original collages of visual/poetic images, (butoh-fu) provide the notational basis for the movement and stillness of butoh.<sup>28</sup>

Studies of the relationship of word, image, language and movement will be contextualised within an historical overview of dance writing, providing an initial means to cite a range of established writing practices to include critical reviews, dance journalism, choreographic notation and other forms of critical analysis. In addition, the writing will reflect some of those concerns regarding the emphasis within dance studies which often disavows the (non speaking) subject in favour of transcription processes, echoing Foster's (1995) criticism that

Traditional dance studies, replete with the same logocentric values that have informed general scholarship on the body have seldom allowed the body this agency [...] they have privileged the thrill of the vanished performance over the enduring impact of the choreographic intent.<sup>29</sup>

Foster's claims regarding the oversubscription in dance towards written accounts will be used to contest performance theories concerning dance and ephemerality put forward by Lepecki<sup>30</sup> drawn throughout a debate on writing about dance. Lepecki's assertion of the

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<sup>27</sup> Fraleigh, S., and Nakamura, T. *Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 54.

<sup>28</sup> Fraleigh, 2006:54.

<sup>29</sup> Foster, S., *Choreographing History* (Indiana University Press, 1995), 15.

<sup>30</sup> Lepecki, A., *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2004).

ephemeral found within critical theories surrounding dance provides a salient starting point on which to develop a proposal for a sustainable dance research method central to which are the interdependent processes of perception, sensation and writing. In addition, dance theorist Mark Franko (1995) helps to foreground further debate on the relationship held between dance and writing, citing dancer Isadora Duncan's self-inscribed movement exploration as a self authorising practice. Duncan's own writings and those of Franko challenge conventional role distinctions held between dancer and choreographer, proposing instead the choreographic act as one of self-authorisation, a concept which is further considered in the context of the North American post modern dance movement in relation to Deborah Hay's daily ritualised dance practice. Dance writer Susan Foster's critique of US dancer and choreographer Deborah Hay's critical disciplinary inquiry into dance as a ritualised and holistic practice, fostered through self directed daily research further offers a useful model of exemplary practice. Foster's writing (2000), aligned here to the teachings of Hay<sup>31</sup>, provides a platform for a continued theoretical debate on the role of physical and perceptual consciousness within dance training and performance. Finally, while the research on offer here does not provide a purely pedagogical inquiry into the development of performance studies in formal education studies, a study of the emergence of particular contemporary performance training methods in the late twentieth century and their methodological bases is useful in foregrounding a further debate on my individual dance and performance training.

Chapter Two, entitled *Distilling Principles*, concerns itself with an investigation into some of those hidden activities of reception that the dancer encounters during the process of acquiring movement skills through training. Embedded throughout the writing are questions regarding my individual modes of engagement with a range of performance training disciplines and their pedagogic context, starting with my experiences as an undergraduate Performing Arts student. Thus follows a period of five years of independent, self directed dance education in the form of mentoring schemes, workshop intensives and negotiated training programs with several European and Japanese butoh dance practitioners whose teachings can be described within the pedagogic context of a practitioner-individualised disciplinary practice.

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<sup>31</sup> Foster, S., 'Introduction' in *My Body, the Buddhist* Hay, D. (Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

Here, the notion of praxis governs the writing at a metalevel through applying a continuous critique of my own learning practices, while evolving separate modes of inquiry in relation to a range of diverse movement approaches and methods. I envision an alignment between my role as trainee under the mentorship of Su-En, and my independent dance research in that both share a similar research process, in selecting through the various practices employed throughout the last three years, the means to identify a relationship to those teaching methods I have been exposed to and the various performance contexts I have created during my practical inquiry. In particular, I focus on a series of practice-led investigations by Su-En into the perception of the butoh dancer's body to a range of particular sites, and the ability to alter the dancer's perception to such a site based on his or her physiological engagement with a series of applied images, in order to construct a choreographic language which functions in response to these particular experiments and which might be used and disseminated in a variety of ways.

In addition, my experiences working as a Writer in Residence as part of a workshop residency led by second generation Japanese butoh dancer Minako Seki<sup>32</sup> will provide research materials in the form of calibrated journalistic responses citing Seki's application of imagery within her teaching methods. Initially, an interrogation of the role of the dancer's perception will be located within Phillip Zarrilli's writings on the psychophysical body, in particular his revisiting of some of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1969) writings on phenomenology. Zarrilli's (2004) essay provides a key site on which to contest current debates surrounding the role of the performer's sense-perception in contemporary performance training praxis.<sup>33</sup> Enlarging on Zarrilli's theories surrounding the role of the senses in performance training, I apply the term 'physical synaesthesia' to a study of the role of the proprioceptive functions of the butoh dancer in stipulating the physiological conditions for creating fragmented and non kinetic movements based on activating simultaneous and multiple points of sensory stimulus to create movement. In presenting an in-depth analysis of some of the physiological principles that surround a range of butoh training methods, physical

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<sup>32</sup> In January 2004 I participated in a one month intensive dance workshop with butoh dancer and choreographer, Minako Seki at her workshop and training centre in Berlin. My role here as Writer in Residence was to assist Seki in collating movement, written and visual responses from her students, to generate an intercultural discussion on the development and application of terminology in butoh training.

<sup>33</sup> Zarrilli, P. 'Toward a Phenomenological Model of the Actor's Embodied Modes of Experience' in *Theatre Journal* Vol. 26 (4) Dec., (John Hopkins University Press, 2004).

synaesthesia will be further employed here as a means of describing the butoh student's interrogation into the normative functions of the proprioceptive system. In such a way, this chapter presents an embedded critique of the role of physical consciousness in butoh, which will be further applied within a spectator analysis in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three, entitled *Surface Tensions*, returns us to the work of butoh performance with which this undertaking initially engaged. It identifies and seeks to reposition certain ethnographically biased accounts of butoh performance within western critical writings, considering some of the receptor frameworks that surround the viewing of butoh from a western spectator position. Thus, a full spectator analysis of Japanese butoh dancer Ko Murobushi's solo production *Edge* will follow an investigation into the ensuing effects of film technologies, dance performance and butoh by way of attempting to locate a self reflexive spectator positioning of Ko's work, with the aim of producing a metacritique of the role of spectatorship in dance. To this end I draw on the feminist work of film theorist Laura Mulvey<sup>34</sup> and in particular her repositioning of the 'performance body' in contemporary cinema through a critical self reflexive gaze – an orientation which I argue provides a useful scheme on which to further develop an analysis of *Edge*. Such a critique is enlarged upon within contemporary performance theory by performance studies theorists, Diane Taylor and Rebecca Schneider, both of whom have interrogated shifting perceptions of the body in performance as influenced by other more popular media forms such as news coverage and television.

Finally, I provide a comparative study of dance ethnographer Judith Hamera's critique of another Japanese butoh artist, Oguri, and his company Renzoku<sup>35</sup>, citing her debate on the role of virtuosity in butoh performance as a means to further debate an idealised western spectator position in relation to an eastern dance form. Where Hamera's critique can be applied usefully to a spectator analysis of Murobushi's work, I am using an ethnographic approach here as a governing trope that enables me to further interrogate butoh in performance from a western positioning, highlighting questions surrounding cultural identity, power and virtuosity in dance. In doing so, I acknowledge the considerable historic parallels that occur within dance, between ethnography and criticism, as based on dance's relatively latent emergence as an academic discipline, and

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<sup>34</sup> Mulvey, L. 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen* Vol. 16 (3), Autumn 1975.

<sup>35</sup> Hamera J. 'The Romance of Monsters: theorizing the virtuoso body in performance' in *Theatre Topics*, Vol.10 (2): 2000.

which dance theorist Sally Banes (1994) suggests, both aligns early critical writings on ballet with nineteenth century amateur anthropological accounts, while highlighting ‘the double effect of historicising present dance criticism [...] and institutionalizing dance criticism as an academic discipline’.<sup>36</sup> Recent developments in anthropology and sociology that address the concept of reflexivity will be further identified and applied here to an investigation into notions of power and identity in performance.

My final chapter, *Sentient Bodies*, addresses the main components of research practices undertaken as part of my practice-led inquiry and is motivated by two aims, reflecting a clear separation of purpose between training/pedagogic and solo performance/production processes:

- to identify alternate methods of accessing dance material for performance beyond studio based practice, deriving site driven choreographic material from a range of specified locations;
- to create the conditions for immersive performance based on the above methods for the stage production of solo dance performance work.

Facilitated through a series of workshops, solo performance processes and rehearsals, my practical research inquiry focuses on alternate means of creating dance performance material outside of a studio-based practice. This shift also represents a turn away from confining butoh to the context of stage craft or production by distilling some of the principles of movement derived from the relationship of the butoh dancer to particular landscapes and environments. Such a distillation of inherent principles of butoh within site-based movement inquiry is motivated by the desire to evolve a method or series of methods for the generation of dance material within non conventional dance spaces, and is articulated through the retrospective analysis of my solo performance work, *Spilt*.

As such, this final chapter demonstrates the emergence of a distinct set of performance sensibilities that are applied within the creation of a solo dance production. *Spilt* focuses on identifying alternate methods of accessing dance material for performance beyond studio based rehearsal processes, in order to create immersive conditions for dance

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<sup>36</sup> Banes, S. ‘Criticism as Ethnography’ in *Writing Dance in the Age of Postmodernism* (Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 18.

performance in the context of theatrical stage production. Developed during a research trip to Kerry, West Ireland in summer 2004, *Spilt* attempts to engage a virtual transfer of specific textures, sights and sounds encountered during my experiences on site back to the context of the performance studio. Again, the role of physical consciousness is applied in the transfer taking place between those distinct perceptual experiences gained working 'on site', their refinement through developing choreographic material, and their re-presentation within stage-based solo performance. In developing a retrospective analysis of the work, I consider two distinct applications of language and movement in *butoh*, differentiating between a purely imagistic application of words, as in the work of Minako Seki which takes place within the studio, as to the direct engagement with a range of animate matter, working outdoors, as initially accessed in Su-En's site based training. A further investigation into some of the solo processes surrounding the creation of this dance work will be evidenced through DVD footage with the aim of producing a metacritique of practice.

The terms of research here are steered by a systemic approach that actively explores the means of articulating the contemporary dancing body through an investigation of its interrelation with a particular landscape, referencing related research areas within the discourses of ecology and geography. In addition, the movement research focuses on the interrelationship between the dancing body and the environment it inhabits through an intercultural lens, through applying the principles of *butoh* and its related movement practice, *Body Weather*, within choreographic research based in rural England. In choosing to confine my site-based choreographic research to the UK, in particular Dartmoor National Park in Devon, I employ the term 'adaptable bodies' in developing a dance vocabulary driven by the interaction between dancer and environment. In particular, I focus on an application of physical and perceptual consciousness within site-specific movement practice in *butoh*, advocating a critical cultural dialogue that interfaces contemporary performance research with an ongoing interrogation of both Japanese and European contemporary choreographic practice. Drawing from Eastern and Western philosophy and developed contemporaneously with *butoh* during the late 1970s in northern Japan, consistent within the philosophy of *Body Weather*, is the perception of the body as an adaptable entity, affected by its external environments as well as its relation to its own internal environments. The study of *Body Weather*,

therefore, can be described as an open investigation into the ever-present vital relationship between these two environments: the internal and the external.

The research cited in Chapter Four contains several performance-, collaborative- and pedagogic outcomes. Cross referenced throughout are links to DVD footage profiling practical research undertaken through solo performance production and workshops. Here, the role of the camera is intrinsic to the work of documentation in isolating points of inquiry along the research process, many of which only become revealed in the retrospective viewing of the material. Partly, this is due to the ability of the camera to frame and objectify the experience as an outside eye and, furthermore, the camera is deliberately used as a moving eye, attached to the mobile bodies of the dancers, offering multiple viewing points. In particular, watching the mobile lens operate as part of the dancer's movement inculcates the camera as an active agent, destabilising the subject/object relationship within the roles of viewer and performer, thus subscribing to an invested or proprioceptive viewing position, which follows earlier spectator debates located in Chapter Three. As such, the role of the camera is paramount in framing key concepts to do with 'proximity', 'perception' and 'perspective' and will be further examined through a range of contemporary visual art and cultural theories including writings by Brian Massumi (2002), and his critical writings on the 'visceral gaze' in the fourth and final chapter.

Research case studies cited in both the writing and the DVD are adapted from a series of outdoor movement workshops, facilitated by interdisciplinary dance collective, *ROCKface*. Founded by myself and Body Weather practitioner Marnie Orr in 2006, the language *ROCKface* works with has evolved from challenging established dance vocabularies through exchanging dialogue with other artists from non-performance disciplines, with the intention of creating a new compositional blueprint for a long-term collaboration in dance practice. One of the main research outcomes of these workshops is to identify and articulate a performance vocabulary embedded in the interaction between dancer and environment with the aim of identifying shared key terms of reference for the construction of potential performance material. In such an instance, the emergent language requires an immediate interactive learning environment which shifts the responsibility from self authorised singular intent towards collective discovery. While the current research project follows those aims outlined above, their formulation

here is dependent on those shared perspectives contributed by the workshop participants - perspectives that are further enlarged through exposure to other disciplines and interdisciplinary methods within the respective science discourses of ecology and geography. Such an exposure to other disciplines allows for an exchange of terms that may otherwise remain self-reflexive, in relocating specific movement terms of reference through transplanting such terms onto a separate yet related discipline while similarly aiming to transfer essential characteristics of both butoh and Body Weather practices from one cultural and geographical terrain to another. Thus, in defining my research terms, the current writing project acknowledges the complex lineage surrounding butoh from its evolution in post war Japan to its current position as an influential component of western contemporary performance praxis. As such, the terms 'translation' and 'transformation' are engaged thematically throughout the evolving writing project as a means of defining a double positioning – between my own appropriation of a cultural dance statement (butoh), and a second translation between my appropriation of both a training method and a performance philosophy and the various means of articulating these outcomes within expert research practice.



## Chapter One WRITING DANCE

### Introduction



Bracelli, Alfabeto Figurato (1632)

The body has languages of its own, based on movement, that are seemingly more powerful than verbal language because they

necessarily retain physical connection to the mutable, material world. [...] a privileging of the body or the material as the destructive/creative aspect of language [...].<sup>37</sup>

Elisabeth Heard, writing on what she terms Artaud's "Hieroglyphic Body" in 2006, describes the distinctiveness of physical languages as opposed to verbal and written ones where, historically, language has evolved as a way to define a thing and, at the same time, to create distance between ourselves and 'it' in order to construct a separate identity between ourselves and the objects that surround us and make up the material world. By way of an initial investigation into some of the languages that are constructed around dance, Heard's assertion regarding physical language above provides a useful

<sup>37</sup> Heard, E. 'Space, Signs and Artaud's Hieroglyphic Body' in *Performance Research Journal* Vol. 11(1) 2006:40-53.

starting point for an investigation into the relationship established between dance and writing and the mutual influences that can be said to have developed - especially as far as the university is concerned - between these two practices. A study of this relationship will provide a site from which to foster a further practical inquiry into a range of dance and, in particular, butoh production processes. I propose to introduce a historical overview of dance writing to include critical reviews, dance journalism, choreographic notation and other forms of theoretical analysis in order to signal the ongoing debate, in writing, on the status of dance. Additionally, the research presented here considers how dance, as a quasi-independent field of study, has evolved over the past three decades to embrace the often hidden processes found within production methods: I propose subsequently to challenge widely-held assumptions regarding dance's dependency on writing as that which serves to ensure its permanence through inscription. Such a development has further served to unsettle traditional relations between dance production and critical writing and will be viewed in the context of the early post-modern dance movement in North America. Historically, comparisons between twentieth century critical treatments of dance and writing will be used to highlight similarities in the evolution of both practices, through a reflection on, respectively, the poststructuralist project in writing, *écriture féminine* and the modernist movement in dance.

Dance theorist Mark Franko initially helps to develop a theory of the relationship between dance and writing. His analysis of Isadora Duncan's work in *Dancing Modernism, Performing Politics*<sup>38</sup> foregrounds a debate on this relationship as cited within the modernist project in dance, while his assertion that dance is in itself a form of writing or inscription in his essay *Mimique*<sup>39</sup> provides a salient starting point to support the focus of the current writing project. In addition, references to arguments surrounding the disposition of dance and presence/non-presence put forward by performance studies theorist Andre Lepecki are drawn on throughout the present debate, providing a basis for further analysis, while reflecting his ability to write from the differing perspectives of expert spectator, ethnographer and practitioner. Lepecki also brings an alternate perspective to dance where he considers the feminine as inseparable from dance<sup>40</sup> – a

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<sup>38</sup> Franko, 1995: 1-24.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid: 'Mimique' in *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*. Ed. Goellner, E.W & Shea Murphy, J. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

<sup>40</sup> Lepecki, A. 'Inscribing Dance' in *Of the Presence of the Body* (ed) Lepecki, A. Wesleyan University Press, Connecticut, 2004.

debate that will be further examined in the context of *écriture féminine* and the challenges it posed to literature. Finally, arguments presented by Lepecki and Franko regarding the ability of writing to function as a fixed entity through which to inscribe dance's presence will be further contested: I cite here the notion of self-advocacy on the part of dance artists, whose work is referenced here as a means to challenge notions widely-held within traditional western dance literature of dance's predisposition towards ephemerality.

### **Staging the Logocentric Body**

The following section focuses on how the relationship between writing and dancing can vary from mutual or interdependent to symbiotic by outlining distinct categories that frame western theatrical dance's relationship to writing. This is achieved by means of developing a metacritique of dance practice. Particular consideration will be given to writing's conventional relation to dance within European classical traditions as established through dance criticism and through published documents in the form of dance notation dating back to the late sixteenth century. Here, I argue that, historically, predominant writing forms used to serve dance subscribe to, respectively, the use of metaphoric description and inherent value systems surrounding the body in western theatrical dance. As a means of defining the latter, I borrow from Lepecki's description of dance, 'understood traditionally as a set of mobilisations requiring a body disciplined to tread without stumbling on smooth spatial temporal grids.'<sup>41</sup> According to Lepecki, a very early authorial position suggesting that dance writing must contend with the impermanence of the live event can be found in Jean George Noverre's 'Letters on Dancing and Ballets' (1760). Here, Noverre identifies dance as 'an art in self erasure'<sup>42</sup>. Lepecki further links Noverre's description with a melancholic disposition that surrounded artistic expression in the late Renaissance period:

For, in the melancholic's theatre, time can make its appearance only after it endures a metonymic displacement; only after finding in what it touches a proxy for its otherwise unseen presence. In the case of dance, the metonymic stand-in for reified time is the dancer. This complicates the dance and the dancer's relationship to lived time, and to historicity.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid: 'Exhausting Dance; Themes for a Politics of Movement' in *Live Art and Performance* (UK: Tate Publications, 2004), 122.

<sup>42</sup> Noverre, Jean-Georges 'Letters on Dancing and Ballet' in *What is Dancing?* Copeland R. & Cohen M. (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>43</sup> Lepecki 2004:124

In order to fully respond to Lepecki's statement, it is worth considering here the fact that many of the key dance performance works of the past century can be accessed visually through archived materials, in at least the form of written review and recorded film and photographic documentation. Vanishing, reclamation, loss and recovery, Lepecki indicates, are tropes which pertain to melancholic tendencies subscribed to during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries within dance and the arts in general. Elsewhere, writing on the difficulties of capturing dance on the page, Lepecki associates memory directly with movement, thus adding further to the notion of the dance archive as a metonymic preservation that reduces and refines the experiential to digestible memory bites, to be recalled in the moment of descriptive definition: '[D]ance always vanishes in front of our eyes in order to create a new past. The dance exists ultimately as a mnemonic imprint of what has just lived there.'<sup>44</sup> Written in response to his collaboration with choreographer and dancer Meg Stuart in 1999, Lepecki's statement compounds his observation by appearing to problematise the widely-established relationship between dance, memory and experience, implying that the majority of written accounts of dance might allude to a fictional presence through their representation, (thereby indicating replacement) of the dancer through writing. However, where such a proposition does not account for the mutual dependence of the dancer on memory as a tool for the recreation of movement, nor indeed within the process of acquiring new movement skills, I suggest that Lepecki's argument pertains to the position of writing, in specific contexts, rather than of dancing.

If, as Noverre and, later, Lepecki suggest, the predicament of dance is to be found in its continuing disappearance, then the act of writing about dance can be said to provide an intervention in seeking to identify a means of preservation. Any form of writing about dance arguably contends with an inherent time lapse in transplanting the mobile dancing body to the horizontal (static) plane of writing - from the actively present physical dance body to its re-interpretation through descriptive account. In doing so, the vanishing or continuing disappearance that Foster (1998) aligns with dance's ephemeral condition can be argued to evade all scriptural measures:

How to write a history of this bodily writing, this body and regiment it,  
leave only we can only know through its writing. How to discover

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<sup>44</sup> Lepecki, A. *Manically Charged Presence* in Ballet International/Tanz Aktuell Yearbook: Friedrich Berlin 1999.

what it has done and then describe its actions in words. Impossible. Too wild, too chaotic, too insignificant. Vanished, disappeared, evaporated into thinnest air, the body's habits and idiosyncrasies, even the practises that codify the most disparate and residual traces.<sup>45</sup>

Foster's petition poses interesting questions for the writer in implicating, as such, the act of writing in relation to the event as a dualistic notion; either one of retrospect – by way of retrieval – or, in preceding the event of dance - as prescriptive. There is an implicit side effect of fictionalisation when dealing with dance across past, present and future time, in that narrativisation implies an automatic distancing from the event itself, and a reinvestment in story-telling codes. Feminist philosopher Helene Cixous (2004) points to the problems of temporality within the material act of writing, where the original thought, or 'truth', no sooner than it is alluded to on paper, becomes 'othered' - distanced from its source.<sup>46</sup> Most dance writing can be said to deal primarily with the body image - the body as closed 'text' - as a fixed entity from which to draw a corresponding written body of evidence. Thus, the critical distance that occurs in the gap between watching, learning or making dance and writing about these experiences must contend with the notion of the dance body as image, memory and history.

Goellner and Shea Murphy (1994) suggest that 'through shifting registers from movement to literature, dance can benefit directly from other disciplines' interrogation [where] literary analysis has long been busy reflexively questioning its own rhetoric and critical strategies'<sup>47</sup>. Certainly, within literature, the poststructuralist project in writing can be seen to deconstruct the role of writing as a project in which meaning, literature, language and speech all serve as independent entities. As Lepecki elsewhere asserts, the ability of the body to address multiple sites of critical inquiry raises problems for the role of writing:

If the body is a pack, a rhizome, a body-image, if it is semantic as much as it is somatic, if it extends across time and space, then in which ways can critical writing assess choreographic work built upon this splayed-out model of the body and of subjectivity?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Foster 1995:4

<sup>46</sup> Cixous, H., 'Alterity: Being Human' in *French Women Philosophers: A Contemporary Reader* Howells, C. (ed) (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 186-200.

<sup>47</sup> Goellner, E.W & Shea Murphy, J. (eds.) *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> Lepecki, 2006: 51

For the current research purposes, I am proposing that a consideration of the deconstructionist project might enable a further challenge to the conventionalised relationship of dance and writing, or rather the writing *of* dance. Within poststructuralist literature, philosopher Jacques Derrida's concept of *difference*, and the strategies associated with it, together offer a further means to propose the possibility that bodies are duplicitous as far as a consideration of past, present/ce and future notions of the live dance event is concerned. Derrida's definition of *difference* as that which is not identical but refers to '[...] the diverted and equivocal passage from one difference to another, one term of opposition to the other'<sup>49</sup>, provides a different locus in terms of which the presence of the dancer might be argued to avoid a dialectic stance between, on the one hand, her continuing disappearing presence through dancing and, on the other, her reappearance through writing. By being both present in the act of dancing, then further (re-) presented through the act of writing, it is the dancer's body itself, in its resistance to verbal representation, that obstructs any potentially fluid exchange between the disappearance implied by dance's ephemerality, and its (re)materialisation through writing, in such a way as to echo Lepecki's problematisation of the dancer and her relationship to lived time and historicity.<sup>50</sup>

For the purposes of the present argument, I propose to identify the live gesture of dance as equivalent to speech, where speech is defined as that which emerges directly from the speaker's body, without mediation. Within such a distinction, the subject speaking (the dancer dancing) can be said to create a secondary presence, or, in the case of dance, a fictional body. In Derrida's words, in fact, the speaking subject, or dancing dancer,

[...] is no longer the person himself, or the person alone, who speaks. The speaking subject discovers his irreducible secondarity, his origin that is always already eluded; for the origin is always already eluded on the basis of an organized field of speech in which the speaking subject vainly seeks a place that is always missing.<sup>51</sup>

In these terms, we should need to recognise the presence of an 'organized field of [dance] in which the [dancing] subject vainly seeks a place that is always missing.'<sup>52</sup> However, unlike speech, dance's 'mute rhetoric'<sup>53</sup> seems to require that a spectator

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<sup>49</sup> Derrida, J. *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Allison, D. (trans.) (Evanston IL: Northwest University Press, 1973), 148.

<sup>50</sup> Lepecki 2004:124

<sup>51</sup> Derrida, J. 'La Parole Souffle' in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1978).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Foster, S. 'Introduction' in *Corporealities* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

might also ‘read into’ the body, or interpret its meaning according to his/her individual engagement with a given gesture or physical expression. Here Abrahms’ definition of expressionism, cited in Franko, ‘as a phenomenon of overflow that “signifies the internal made external”<sup>54</sup> provides a useful means to identify the immediacy of the live, and therefore irretrievable nature of the ‘speech act’ of dance (Ong:1982). Dance’s muteness, on this basis, might be regarded as an act of deference to the other, to bestow the meaning-potential of the physical movement or gesture upon the viewer, a notion which will be further explored within a debate on dance spectatorship in Chapter Three. What is of interest here is the implication of a second or duplicate body created through the simultaneous occurrence of speaking dance and the materiality of the speech/dance, thus gaining a separate identity to that of the speaker/dancer. Roland Barthes, writing in 1977, points to a similar relation held between song and text, where he signals the autonomy of the speech act of song as found ‘[...] by the very friction between the music and something else, which something else is the particular language (and no-wise the message). The song must speak – must write [...]’.<sup>55</sup> Barthes’ suggestion that the materiality of the body might be expressed through the voice, thus gaining autonomy from both the body of the performer and the spoken (or, in this instance, sung-) word, re-inscribes the materiality of language as distinct from meaning or signification processes.

Significantly, Franko’s casting of Derrida’s theories offers an alternative to other writers’ notion of dance’s signature emblem of ephemerality: in Lepecki, for example,

Whereas ephemerality had glorified but also trivialized and marginalized dance as that profoundly apolitical activity (its deepest nature unplanned, its most essential sense irrecoverable), the “disappearance” trope recasts the body’s provisional interventions in space or theory as a textuality of its own making.<sup>56</sup>

Elsewhere, Franko asserts that the irretrievable and unpredictable nature of dance is paradoxical to the extent that ‘[dance’s] historicity derives from its divorce from immediacy: it is not wholly explicable in/as a present’<sup>57</sup>. However, where ‘it’ is not wholly explicable in/as present, the notion of the dancer’s perpetual agency in

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<sup>54</sup> Abrahms sourced in Franko, 1995: 160

<sup>55</sup> Barthes, R. ‘The Grain of the Voice’ in *Image, Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 85.

<sup>56</sup> Lepecki 2004: 184

<sup>57</sup> Lepecki, A., ‘Five Theses on Laughter After All’ in *Moving Words – Re-writing Dance* (London: Routledge, 1996).

disappearing from within the stated present moment of a dance (self-erasure) reverberates with 'its' disappearance also from beyond the dance's present, to be further re-presented through being viewed or written about retrospectively. Of particular concern here however, is the location of a written counterpart to dance that might function as both preservation document and, in applying itself to the body in motion, might also account for the present and non present states that occur in registering movement on paper.

### **Choreo-graphing Dance**

The term 'choreography' might be said to imply an equivalent to writing – a mediated language – where 'graph' indicates the symbolic representation of other visually dominant forms such as drawing, painting, engraving and etching. Film theorist Sergei Eisenstein considers initial writing distinctions between different language forms:

While the alphabet is phonetic in nature, this is not true of other written languages. Writing systems [...] may also be logographic, in which case the written sign represents a single word, or ideographic, in which ideas or concepts are represented directly in the form of glyphs or characters.<sup>58</sup>

Japanese calligraphy, for example, operates within an ideographic system where, like dance, it communicates in images, unmediated by words.<sup>59</sup> Of particular interest to the current writing project, however, is whether the term choreograph might be considered equivalent to writing (or equivalent to established writing forms) in terms of its intervention into dance, where Lepecki suggests of dance:

If we equate particular expressive forms with acknowledged language or language systems we go some way towards equating choreographic intervention in dance with that of mediated language in writing.<sup>60</sup>

Prior to Noverre, in 1589 the French dance critic Thoinot Arbeau argued that dance writing incurred an 'archival commandment'<sup>61</sup>. By committing the steps of a dance to writing, writing's initial function can be seen to preserve the 'ephemeral' act of dance both for posterity and as a means for dissemination: it would be prescribed for future

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<sup>58</sup> Eisenstein, Sergei *Film Forum* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and the World, 1995).

<sup>59</sup> See Fraleigh, S. H. 'Introduction' in *Dancing Into Darkness: Butoh, Zen and Japan* (Pittsburg: Pittsburgh Dance Books, 1999).

<sup>60</sup> Lepecki, 2004: 124-139.

<sup>61</sup> Arbeau, T. (1589) *Orchesography: A Treatise in the Form of a Dialogue Whereby All Manner of Persons May Easily Acquire and Practise the Honourable Exercise of Dancing* (trans.) Beaumont, C. (New York: Dance Horizons, 1968). Cited in Lepecki 2004: 125



replication. Such a means of preservation can be said to be motivated both by the desire to further replicate the dance for future use in the form of prescription - a protracted account of practice through an acknowledged graphic means of presentation – and, furthermore, to relegate dance to the word in the form of description, be that critical commentary or academic discourse or both. Foster signals a later eighteenth century philosophical approach to the dance body as maintaining a distinct separation between its live presence and its re-presentation on paper:

Even construed as a language in Enlightenment thought, the body's gestures begin to signify that which cannot be spoken. The unique role for gesture prepares the way for a complete separation between dance and text that occurs in the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup>

Such a statement supports Heard's earlier suggestion of physical language as maintaining a connection to the material world, while privileging the body's materiality within both the destructive and creative aspects of language.

Dance writing is considered here under the term 'archival commandment', as equivalent to a choreographic tool which functions as a form of commandment, or a representational code, in order to be consumed, replicated and disseminated. Certainly, as my critique on dance spectatorship in Chapter Three will illustrate, the role of technology can be regarded as creating further intervention where dance can be captured, recreated and manipulated, enabling a further narrativisation through the fostering of additional 'fictional bodies'. However, for the present purposes, where formal choreographic notation might function as both 'archival commandment' and reference tool, written manuals of dance can be argued to effect a certain distancing and generalising of their subject where the manual is indicative rather than directive; non specific and depersonalised - all traits which seem to remove the immediacy or intimacy from the dance act itself. In such an instance, in order to comply with its scriptural counterpart, the choreographic act can be described as non-interventionist where the dance body must adhere to certain syntax within which dance may be framed and interpreted accordingly.

The effects of what I present here as a syntactical exchange within an equally symmetric language structure, are highlighted in Lepecki's critique of Thoinot Arbeau's 'Orchesography' (1589), in which he suggests Arbeau's use of language 'still

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<sup>62</sup> Foster 'Textual Evidences' in Goellner, E. and Shea Murphy, J., 1995: 234.

demonstrates trust in a semiotic symmetry between writing and dancing that guarantees the unproblematic traffic from one and the other.’<sup>63</sup> Franko (1995) espouses such a claim where he argues that current definitions of western theatrical dancing today still adhere to those principles of symmetry first underscored within Renaissance European court dances. Classical ballet provides a clear example of such symmetry, where the dancer is trained to balance or pivot on taut, muscle-bound legs, her arms extending upwards in ethereal counterpoise (Foster 19996) echoing the classic triangular form found in Leonardo da Vinci’s ‘The Proportions of a Human Figure’ (circa 1485).<sup>64</sup> Franko proceeds to suggest that in adhering to symmetric configuration, balance and harmony, such engendered dance forms reflect a preoccupation with bodily form as based on those physical attributes which still subscribe to Platonian notions of beauty found within classical ideologies.<sup>65</sup> Hence, the following section will argue that respective influences held between certain western idealised physical forms and the historic writing of dance in the form of notation can be said to have prescribed upon modern dance a hidden agenda that may, in fact, have limited its capacity for exploring fully the body’s movement potential by excluding other non kinetic or displaced forms of dance.

Consistent with Franko’s notion of syntactical exchange is the dance notation system pioneered by modern dancer and choreographer Rudolph Laban, who reportedly regarded movement as comparable to living architecture, as Hodgson and Dunlop (1990) suggest: ‘The body reflects the stability of architecture in its vertical and horizontal skeletal structure. The three dimensionality of arches and pillars is reflected in formal gesture.’<sup>66</sup> His scored principles for the study of movement – Labanotation – draw on spatial metaphors which can be seen to retain certain classical ideals of symmetry, harmony and beauty, while simultaneously embracing modernist ideologies. As Hodgson and Preston-Dunlop proceed to note:

Using the Platonic identification of perfect forms of solids, he was able to draw attention to relationships and chart routes which passed

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<sup>63</sup> Lepecki, 2004: 126.

<sup>64</sup> See Leonardo, da Vinci, 1452-1519. *The drawings of Leonardo da Vinci* (introduction and notes by A.E. Popham).

<sup>65</sup> For further guidance see Franko, M. *The Dancing Body in Renaissance Choreography* (Birmingham, Ala.: Summa Publications, 1986).

<sup>66</sup> Hodgson, C & Preston-Dunlop, V., *Rudolf Laban: an introduction to his work & influence* (Plymouth: Northcote, 1990), 3.

through points of orientation by seeing the body within the icosahedron, the cube, and so on.<sup>67</sup>

Laban's dance manuals, which still constitute one of the primary teaching materials for Dance and Choreography Studies in secondary and tertiary education today, are based on his research in factories and other domestic labour environs where his movement analysis system was initially derived from the mechanical and economic rhythms pertaining towards labour and production.<sup>68</sup> Reflecting a modernist sensibility with form, repetition, functionality, and universality, Laban's preoccupation with symmetry posits the dancer in a 360 degree sphere where movement's causality issues from the centre of the body, achieving an equivalent graphic description that clearly delineates the body in space and time. Of particular concern here is whether those dominant architectural forms that can be seen to underscore much of Laban's notational system, might be regarded as echoing similar diametric forms found within writing? I argue here that the notation of dance can be seen to subscribe equally to a phallogocentric view where the mutual semiotic symmetry that Franko points can be regarded as compliant with certain hypothetically dominant patriarchal forms found within western language structures<sup>69</sup>.

### **The Delineated Body: *Feminine as Apparition in Dance Writing***

While the work of later twentieth century feminist writers such as Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray founded within the writing project 'écriture féminine', have provided a debate through which to interrogate the ways that language has historically been structured from a male or phallogocentric view, interestingly, Foster's feminist critique, entitled 'The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe'<sup>70</sup>, pursues its own agenda by providing

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid: 50

<sup>68</sup> The following report was accessed at Dartington Hall Trust Archive, May 2005, and describes Laban's assistant Miss Newlove's visit to Dartington Hall Ltd in May 10-21, 1943:

'Part time worker Mrs Dodd uses the hoe wrongly. Her work would be improved through appropriate instruction on the spot [...]. Miss Farmer, acting as tail boy, showed nervous contraction of facial muscles. This might be partly a reaction to the noise – to which she is apparently not yet used – and partly a reaction to dust [...]. Land girls activities in poultry yard extend from fine touch [...]. Reports such as the above proved case studies for what later was published as 'Lawrence Industrial Rhythm' – a series of corrective movement recommendations for workers at Dartington Hall. For fuller guidance on the relationship of choreographic notation systems and industrial production see Franko, M. *The Work of Dance: Labour, Movement and Identity in the 1930s* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

<sup>69</sup> For fuller guidance see Lacan, J., 'The Signification of the Phallus' (1958). Here, Lacan advocates that the functioning of language is equivalent to the functioning of desire, considering the role of linguistic structures as reflecting a biological disposition.

<sup>70</sup> Foster, S. 'The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe' in *Corporealities* Routledge: New York, 1996.

a gender-based account of those architectural forms that dominate classical western theatrical dance. Here, she proposes that the predominant physicality aimed for in ballet training upholds certain principles of male supremacy and female subservience - the female body striving toward an ephemeral, flighty quality which must disguise at all costs the supreme effort involved in achieving such transcendent moves, while the male figure ‘promenades around the single pointe on which she balances [...] his gaze following her, his arm gestur[ing] a pathetic desire.’<sup>71</sup> Where Labanotation subscribes to certain symmetric architectural forms in dance, demonstrating what I argue to be a symbolic exchange with an equivalent phallogentric disposition within written language forms, I suggest that the ensuing results might be argued as operating mainly through the production of a systematic kinetic movement form that remains relatively limited within its own symmetric logic.

It is useful at this point to defer to Lepecki’s tripartite model which binds writing, dance and the feminine:

[D]ance cannot be imagined without writing, it does not exist outside writing’s space, just as dance cannot be perceived without the apparition (even if by a negative ghostliness, a reactionary disavowal) of the feminine.<sup>72</sup>

To the above might be added that speech and language *do* exist independently of writing just as dance languages exist independently of choreography, however choreography *must* substantiate its relation to dance via certain established language forms such as notation or archival command. In investigating further the parallels that Lepecki draws between dance, writing and the feminine, while the present argument does not focus on a feminist critique of dance, it is worth distinguishing here between Lepecki’s treatment of the feminine as apparition and the feminist project of repositioning literature to address the phallogentricity in language forms found within *écriture féminine*.

Lepecki’s avowal of the feminine in dance raises questions regarding the different applications of dance writing as manual in adhering to a dominant male language discourse where the prescription of dance relies on such a form of commandment. However, the manual application of dance through certain means of graphic

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid:1

<sup>72</sup> Lepecki, 2004:124

representation such as Labanotation would appear directly opposed to Lepecki's model in that it presupposes a delineation of dance that might be indicated through a syntactical model in accordance with a similar convention as that of writing. Foster points to the historic bind dominating nineteenth and twentieth century discourses surrounding dance and writing where dance, as a dynamic and unassailable force, must subsequently rely on text as instrumental in providing a stabilising written counterpart:

So powerful is this attribution of mutually exclusive functions for dance and writing throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century that its historical specificity has only recently been questioned.<sup>73</sup>

However, Lepecki asserts that dance and text can and do operate independently of one another and, furthermore, he suggests that it is precisely those slippages endowed to the fictional and often manifold bodies created within the singular propulsion of live movement that enable a reading of dance to continue to traverse these three sites:

The spaces of friction constituted by the restless tensions between body and text, movement and language, indicate precisely a limitless contiguity among dance, writing and femininity.<sup>74</sup>

Franko (2004) initially cites the modernist project on the body as linked to autonomy:

Historically, movement as a modernist object is linked to 1920's experiments with labour efficiency. [...] The attempt to represent human motion in its pure path and visualised time frame is directly related to concerns for the autonomy of modern dance. If personal effect could be eliminated from dance, bodily movement would obtain an autonomous significance. It would appear aesthetically absolute in its physical self delineation.<sup>75</sup>

For the purposes of the present argument, Franko's identification of the onset of modernism in dance is pertinent in that it marks a departure from those didactic social and culturally coded gender rituals that underpinned much of traditional nineteenth century European court dances, towards the notion of dance as pure physiological expression. Furthermore, Franko's claims for self agency in the dancer can be seen here to parallel Foster's idea of critical self reflexivity within her description of the dance writer as ' [...] mark(ing) the movement the writer herself makes between her observations as viewer and her leaps as writer, between her active spectatorship and her rhetorical performance.'<sup>76</sup> Franko's application of the term absolutism implies a finality;

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<sup>73</sup> Foster, S. in Goellner and O'Shea 1995:234.

<sup>74</sup> Lepecki, 2004:125.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.:xi

<sup>76</sup> Foster-Leigh, S. 'Introduction' in *Choreographing History*, Indiana University Press, 1995.

in the context of delineation, a closure of representation - a signature. Performance theorist Bojana Kunst (2003) further ascribes to Franko's alignment of autonomy and modernism:

Autonomy thus became the key strategy employed by the body to enter the stage of modernity and disclose its own contemporary flow: it is autonomous yet evasive, self-disclosing yet artificial [...]. not only does this bodily departure to modernity reveal itself as a specific aesthetic strategy, but it is a philosophical, aesthetic, political and ideological utopia; a new possibility of articulating subjective embodiment. On one side a reaction to, on the other an upgrade of modern rationalization: an employment of artificial tactics and, at the same time, a return to nature. Summing up, bodily autonomy discloses a modern obsession with presence and being in the present at the same time.<sup>77</sup>

Notably, Duncan's significance as a dancer stems from her role in shifting the private or autobiographical sphere into the public or performative space, while marking an historic break with previous forms of mimetic or gestural dance, based on universal themes. In exposing the individual persona of the dancer through both narrative/theatrical and autobiographic/factual means, Duncan's dance can be seen to serve as a site on which the self-expressive in movement can be considered valid material for theatrical choreography. However, the process of negating the personal through self delineation in dance that Franko points to above is further compounded here by the presence (or absence) of the dancer. What happens to the dancer in the act of 'self delineation'? The 'aesthetic absolutism' suggested by Franko above appears dialectical where it can be described as literally delineating the body from the outside - from form back to feeling. Duncan's contemporaries Mary Wigman and, later, Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham are names which continue to inform dance technique practices today. In particular, Graham and Cunningham's continuing legacy is inscribed within singular methodological approaches to dance, supporting Franko's claim for the autonomous significance of bodily movement. However, the appropriation of a range of individual styles, characteristics, motivations and movement intentions into a signature method would appear to forsake some of those claims for self agency set out by Foster and endorsed by Duncan in returning the dancer, once again, to the process of inscription. However, as Lynn Turner (2003) suggests, in her critique of authorship in contemporary cinematic practices:

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<sup>77</sup> Kunst, B., 'Subversion and the Dancing Body: Autonomy on Display' in *Performance Research Journal* vol.8 (2) June 2003: 61-68.

If signature in any of its forms, is taken as a synecdoche of writing in the generalised Derridean sense of the term, then 'signature', paradoxically, only becomes legible not through manifesting an inherent aura of originality but through its repeatability as a mark.<sup>78</sup>

The concept of a signature method through refined technical means as can be seen in the current pedagogical application of 'Graham' or 'Cunningham' dance technique can be contested as both delimiting the individual choreographer's presence here as author, while rendering individual agency of part of the dance student obsolete. However, a distinction should be made at this point between the self-authorising act of the solo dancer, such as Duncan, and the clear delineation of roles required in crafting a choreographic aesthetic on a company of professional dancers, whereby the individual signature of the practitioner only becomes legible, as Turner suggests, through its 'repeatability as a mark'<sup>79</sup>. For the current research purposes, it is the authorization of the multitude of roles undertaken by the solo dancer which are of particular concern. Although Duncan's own statements regarding her work are confined to diaries and autobiographical accounts, her ability to occupy the respective roles of writer, choreographer, dancer and theorist, underscored here by both Franko and Foster, can be regarded as imperative in paving the way for further dance artists in the twentieth and twenty first century to develop self-delineated dance writing practices and will be examined in relation to Deborah Hay's solo choreographic practice below.

### **UNDERScores: *the postmodern dance movement in North America***

Carol Martin (1996) suggests that, historically, 'the master narrative that has typified modern dance is one of canonical choreographers with aesthetic agendas'.<sup>80</sup> Such agendas, it would seem, predisposed dance as an area for academic study towards aesthetic criteria, attracting criticism mainly based on highly conventional visual ideals of beauty, harmony, symmetry and virtuosity. During the late 1960s in the US however, dance artists such as Trisha Brown, Simone Forti and Deborah Hay challenged conventionally held assumptions of dance production methods that emphasised technical precision and virtuosic skill within the crafting of individualised professional practitioner-led movement vocabularies, towards refining a performance aesthetic

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<sup>78</sup> Turner, L. 'Braiding Polyphony' in *Performance Research Journal* Vol. 8 (1) 2003: 94.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid: 94

<sup>80</sup> Martin, C., 'High Critics/Low Arts', in Morris, G (ed.), *Moving Words: Re-writing Dance* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 323.

within a company of professional dancers. Instead, they succeeded in shifting the focus back to the individual dancer's interpretation of movement and the conscious application of dance as an experiential tool. As founding members of the Judson Dance Theatre collective in the early 1960s, which also included Steve Paxton and Yvonne Rainer, and whose work was staged through a series of regular performance events at the Judson Memorial Church in New York, these dance artists progressed through collaborative and experimental practice, 'united by their radical approach to choreography and their urge to reconceive the medium of dance'<sup>81</sup>, thus successfully prioritising process over production. The performance works which emerged out of Judson, often staged in outdoor public spaces, galleries and other non conventional dance spaces using both trained and non trained dancers, firmly positioned the dancer's body as a site for exploration and experimentation, where dance became its own subject for study, arguably transmitting both a philosophy of movement and a contemporary movement expression, as well as a critique of aesthetic convention. Lepecki (2006) further aligns the North American postmodern dance movement's critique of representation with the political project of performance art and the aesthetics of minimalism.<sup>82</sup> Chapter Three will consider where the boundary starts to merge between butoh and performance art, locating on the one hand, the performative body in butoh and on the other, the material body as represented politically in performance art as following a similar process of transformation through objectification.

Some of the signature early works of the postmodern dance movement in North America exemplified this notion of choreographic agency by exaggerating dance's representational value, thus emphasizing 'an awareness of bodily autonomy'<sup>83</sup>. In Yvonne Rainer's 'Trio A' (1968) for example, her technically trained dance body forsakes conventional movement discipline in the form of technical competence or articulate control in favour of emphasising the ordinariness of 'pedestrian' movements. However, where Rainer's act of perceiving her ordinary or everyday physical gestures undergoes a transformation by virtue of those same 'pedestrian' movements being placed within the context of the performance space, her work probes a self conscious

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<sup>81</sup> Banes, S., 'Introduction' in *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987), xiv.

<sup>82</sup> Lepecki 'Introduction' in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. Routledge, New York, 2006.

<sup>83</sup> Kunst, B., *Subversion and the Dancing Body: Autonomy on Display* Performance Research Journal vol.8 (2), June 2003: 61-68.



intervention into the representational space of dance performance. Similarly, Trisha Brown's company formed and created dances for alternative sites: 'Walking on the Wall' (1971) used a series of ropes suspended across a gallery which the dancers followed, their bodies at right angles to the ground, their unorthodox use of space highlighting the functional concept of choreography by advocating the temporal and spatial configurations of any number of bodies - using both professional and non professional dancers - in any given location as valid choreographic composition.<sup>84</sup> Choreography, thus, became accepted as a way of structuring any form of movement activity, simply by arranging the relationship of movement, momentum, dynamics and direction.

Kathy Duncan, reviewing an ensemble choreographic work by post modern choreographer Mary Fulkerson in 1974 suggests that such strategies served to provide an intimacy for the spectator in both exposing the conventions of theatricalised dance and allowing for individual associative references to be generated in the solo act of viewing:

When you go far enough you can put all of art into a person's mind. We can see dances by looking at the designs of people walking through a revolving door [...] but I still like to draw a line between what is man-made for another's experience and what is not. There is this thing called performance. [...] (Fulkerson) can perform the idea that she is not performing. She lets you see what is happening to her.<sup>85</sup>

Within the early postmodern dance movement it is worth noting how, in addition to those independent dance artists cited above, established US choreographers such as Merce Cunningham, James Waring and Paul Taylor further contributed to the departure from a traditional handling of teaching dance as a craft or technical skill, providing, in Sally Banes's words, 'a precedent for breaking with the modern dance "academy" [while] the academy itself provided the methods, techniques, and definitions that were once avant-garde, but now [1960/70s] served as the givens of the art - there to be sampled, borrowed, criticized, subverted.'<sup>86</sup> Foster (2000) locates the shift away from singular form-based movement created within professional companies for the purposes of stage production, towards an engagement in the processes surrounding the creation of dance as occurring within postmodern dance:

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<sup>84</sup> Banes: *ibid*

<sup>85</sup> Duncan, K., in *Soho Weekly News* 2/1/74 (article title missing)

<sup>86</sup> Banes: 1993, xv

Unlike modern dance pioneers such as Martha Graham and Doris Humphries, whose vocabularies seemed to issue from pan-human psychic dynamics, choreographers from the mid 1960s shifted the focus away from psychological origins and toward the physical matter of dance-making.<sup>87</sup>

The emphasis on dance creation as opposed to production which occurred during the late 1960s and 1970s arguably destabilised dance's smooth ontological ground<sup>88</sup>, blurring traditional distinctions between choreographer and dancer - and between training and performance. As such, many postmodern dance performances relied on a particular sensibility or application of energy in the performer, rather than a level of technical competence. Notable developments which have taken place in the area of dance production, education and training, informed by key twentieth century dance practitioners across both the UK and US, have shifted the emphasis away from the aesthetic presentation of dance towards an exploration of the role of consciousness in dance training and performance.

Such measures also challenged conventional relations between professional dance performance and critical writing, severing traditional relations between dance critic and professional performers. Bill T Jones, another US postmodern choreographer, created a performance 'Still/Here' in 1994, which involved both trained and non-trained dancers and was based around themes of dying. A tribute to his long term partner, dancer Arnie Zane, who had died from AIDS in 1988, Jones's work involved the life stories of volunteer participants, all of whom had first-hand experience of terminal illness. Established dance writer and critic Arlene Croce condemned the work, refusing to attend, protesting on the grounds that her work as a dance critic could not proceed as, by using 'victims' of circumstance as a valid source for creating performance material, Jones had, effectively, 'put himself beyond the reach of criticism'<sup>89</sup>. Notably, by refusing to attend, meanwhile publishing a damning critique of the (unseen) piece, Croce's vindication of the work on the grounds that any critical evaluation would be invalidated by Jones's chosen content here, adversely served to attract widespread interest in the work, thus signalling the increasing autonomy of the dance artist from the critic's evaluation. Carole Martin's subsequent critique of Croce's evaluative response to Jones's work in 1996, further suggests how the choreographer in question subscribed

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<sup>87</sup> Foster, S. 'Introduction' in *My Body the Buddhist* Wesleyan University Press, 2000 p.xi

<sup>88</sup> Lepecki: 2004.

<sup>89</sup> Croce, A. 'Discussing the Undiscussable' in *The New Yorker* Dec 6 / Jan 2, 1994: 54-60

to a postmodernist precept in aligning the personal with the political by minimizing the gap between the art work and the viewer: 'Jones privileges experience over pretence. Thus the gap narrows between art and life, and, in turn, perhaps between the stage and the spectators.'<sup>90</sup>

### **DEBORAH HAY: *practicing consciousness – playing awake***

As a founder member of Judson Dance Theatre, Deborah Hay, like many of her contemporaries, was formative in shifting the power relations between individual choreographic statements and their execution by trained expert dance practitioners, to adopting the interchangeable roles of facilitator and interpreter in producing a collective intent and philosophy of movement and performance. She describes her decision to extend her understanding of dance from form-based movement repertoire towards the cultivation of independent research as motivated by the need to foster what she terms 'daily self directed practise'.<sup>91</sup> Susan Foster (2000) characterises Hay's holistic approach to choreography:

Hay's work exemplifies a radical and fully realized vision of this kind of alternative training program and choreography. Many contemporary choreographers blur or obscure the ways that training inculcates aesthetic values by working with pick-up companies whose dancers acquire an amalgamation of dance styles, such as release work, contact improvisation and ballet. Hay, instead, nurtures the relationship between her approach to dance training and performance, and she stands by its integrity.<sup>92</sup>

Foster proceeds to note how Hay has evolved in her practice a highly individualised and autonomous 'alternative artistry [which] has challenged general assumptions about what dance is, and has also turned its critical reflexivity toward her own artists practice'.<sup>93</sup> Following her formal dance education, studying ballet technique from the age of five to fifteen before moving on to study contemporary dance, Hay worked with postmodern choreographer Merce Cunningham for two years, performing large scale repertoire works, before leaving the company to focus on developing solo work and large scale choreographic works for both trained and non trained dancers. Hay's approach to dance

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<sup>90</sup> Martin: 1996

<sup>91</sup> Adapted from an unpublished audience presentation provided by Deborah Hay as part of *Summer Shift 2005* International Workshop program at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, hosted by the Centre for Performance Research.

<sup>92</sup> Foster 2000: xi

<sup>93</sup> Ibid

is founded on a highly personalised daily commitment to a practice that sets the act of dance research apart from the usual pressures of professional production and sporadic rehearsal periods that can often dominate within the continued development of professional dance companies. Instead, Hay's commitment to a daily movement practice allows her to 'mingle descriptions of living, training, creating and performing so as to illuminate the integral relation between artistic vision and the daily pursuit of that vision.'<sup>94</sup> I first encountered Hay's teaching method in 1995 when I attended an international contemporary performance symposium at the School of New Dance Development in Amsterdam, entitled 'The Connected Body'. Throughout this two week intensive workshop, Hay facilitated twenty dance artists, providing an intuitively lead experiential learning model which posed little separation between acquiring movement sensibility and developing performance materials. Dancers were encouraged to 'practice consciousness', moving freely while paying attention to the immediate visceral sensations created, fostering a direct relation between those internal sensations noted and their external realisation. Hay further defines this process:

The role of consciousness is choice.  
Consciousness of movement is performance.  
A performance meditation practice is the choice of the performer  
to exercise movement consciousness.<sup>95</sup>

Throughout her workshops Hay repeatedly presents the paradoxical manifesto: 'Thank Heavens for the limitations of the three dimensional body that allows us to play'.<sup>96</sup> By constantly reminding students that they are teaching themselves by attending rigorously to the body's impulses, Hay outlines the relationship between the individual dancer's three dimensional form and a sensitivity to both his/her surrounding relation to space and to other dancer's bodies. Her invitation to consider the limits of the body's architectural frame as providing a site on which to maintain a constant investigation into the multiple possibilities for movement that might occur, is also conterminous with each dancer's perception of his or her own physical limitations. The calibration of such individualised modes of perception here can be seen to emphasise Gay Morris's descriptions of poststructuralist writer Michel Foucault in relation to agency: '(w)hen Foucault does come to concern himself with agency [...] he produces a subject who

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid: ix-x

<sup>95</sup> Taken from performance notes for Hay's choreography, 'Lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb...', a large scale dance work, choreographed for forty four trained and untrained dancers and realised during a four month performance workshop titled 'Playing Awake 1991' in Austin, Texas. See Hay: 1994

<sup>96</sup> Taken from workshop with Deborah Hay, The Connected Body Symposium, School of New Dance Development, Amsterdam, June 2005.

explores the limits of identity through self-interrogation, thereby gaining a measure of freedom.<sup>97</sup> Such a notion of individual self-reflexivity has implications for the solo (self authorising) dancer / choreographer. Foster further promotes the notion of self-advocacy on the part of the individual within all dance activity as imperative in '[...] approach(ing) the body's involvement in any [dance] activity with an assumption of potential agency to participate in or resist whatever forms of cultural production are underway.'<sup>98</sup> Hay's repeated invitation to 'play awake' in her workshops remind the student to constantly engage and ask questions of where their attention lies in any given moment of movement.

When you observe each other perform, are you aware of seeing the absence and presence of consciousness? Is it a myth that consciousness is visible? When you see the absence of consciousness are you thinking, 'At this moment I must remember to play awake'? Are you being reminded of the traps so you aren't their victim when it is your turn to perform? [...] The more attention I bring to playing, the finer the gaps requiring my attention.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly, in her solo work 'Beauty', Hay challenges the dancer - herself - to pay attention to every moment of conscious movement and thought process present throughout the performance. 'Beauty' is a solo score – operating both as performance text and as spoken choreography, which incorporates stage directions and reflective commentary as well as repeated verbal and physical propositions. Written in the second person, the text addresses the reader / dancer directly, echoing certain early postmodern principles in negating conventional values in dance:

You deliberately avoid smooth action, economy or alignment.  
You do not make it easy just because you are performing in front of an audience. [...] You will not be misled by looking for beauty in shape and/or content.<sup>100</sup>

Hay describes prefaces the text with 'Notes for the performer of (Beauty)', thereby directing her own attention towards an evocation to remain conscious at all moments, using the repeated suggestion, '*what if...?*':

*What if* where you are experimentally, questions the fluidity of movement; the kind of behavioural patterning that flows from a reservoir of training [...]

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<sup>97</sup> Morris, G. 2000: 52-82.

<sup>98</sup> Foster, 1995:15

<sup>99</sup> Hay 1994:20

<sup>100</sup> Hay, D. 'Notes for the performer of Beauty'. This is an edited version of an essay that was originally commissioned by the Institute for Choreography and Dance (icd) for *Choreographic Encounters* Vol. 1 ed. Mary Brady, 2003.

*What if every cell in your body has the potential to perceive beauty  
and surrender beauty, at once, each and every moment?*

However, the writing is not limited to Hay's own performance score: I have witnessed this particular performance twice – once, presented by Hay at a conference address in Aberystwyth<sup>101</sup>, and once by contemporary Irish dancer Ella Clarke in an informal studio dance presentation<sup>102</sup>. Hay's own performance was evenly divided between directly reading the text to her audience, presenting projected video clips of previous solo performance works of the same title, and delivering short intermittent gestural phrases in silence. In contrast, Clarke appeared to memorise Hay's score, performing the work silently, with the inclusion of costume (an over-sized pink leotard and thick flesh coloured tights) and tightly choreographed phrases delivered with awkward intensity and arguably heightened consciousness. Both versions of 'Beauty' would appear to subscribe to Franko's notion of 'aesthetic absolutism' in describing the body from the outside - from form back to feeling – whilst explicitly pertaining to individual modes of perception in articulating a shift from feeling back to choreographic form through a perpetual verbal and physical commentary of those invisible mechanisms at work in performing dance. Foster's diverse proposition for a dance which manifests the interrelation of words and movement, body and theory would appear pertinent to a wider reading of 'Beauty' here, where she implies the possibility blurring of such distinctions:

(W)hat if we allow movement as well as words the power to interpret?  
What if we find in choreography a form of theorizing? What if learning  
to choreograph, the choreographer learns to theorize, and learning to  
dance, the dancer assimilates the body of facts and the structuring of  
discursive frameworks that enable theorization to occur? What if the  
body of the text is a dancing body, a choreographed body? <sup>103</sup>

In both performances of 'Beauty', the roles of dancer, choreographer, writer and performer become obscured, where the dance itself can be said to evolve through physical, literary and metaphoric means - through the act of 'self delineation'. I suggest here that Hay's above performance work strongly advocates agency in the dancer where it emphasises the role of individual interpretation and self-reflective practice throughout

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<sup>101</sup> The text was produced in its edited form by Deborah Hay, to accompany her performance of the same title at the Magdalena Women's Theatre Symposium at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, hosted by the Centre for Performance Research, July 2006.

<sup>102</sup> Ella Clarke performed the work as part of the *Irish Choreographers New Works Platform*, held at the Dance Ireland Studios in Dublin, June 1998.

<sup>103</sup> Foster in Goellner and O'Shea 1995:234

the process of performing a solo dance work. The explicit relation held here between the written and the moved reveals a constant dialogue between internalised and externalised movement processes and will be further explored in the following chapter in relation to the role of physical consciousness surrounding training processes in dance. Here, Hay's own philosophy regarding agency in the dancer provides a useful starting point to develop a critique of my own formal training experiences in a range of expert disciplinary performance practices which can be said to have fostered an ethos of independent dance practice and which will serve as a platform to further interrogate the role of physical consciousness in butoh dance. Thus, what follows is an investigation into a range of contemporary performance techniques and their pedagogic application which will provide a basis on which to debate the distinctiveness of butoh pedagogy in fostering a movement sensibility that is predicated on the notion of *agency* in the dance student.

## **Chapter Two      DISTILLING PRINCIPLES**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a personal and critical approach to butoh based on my experience of Swedish butoh dancer and teacher Su-En's training methods, with a comparison study of training methods undertaken with Japanese Butoh dancer Minako Seki. Both artists live and work in Europe, having trained in Japan during the 1980s. Questions of translation and transformation are presented here through a brief historic overview of butoh, following evolving training attitudes and pedagogic developments from its origins in post war Japan to the present day. Applying a detailed anatomical study of physical consciousness as a physiological research of the body in butoh training, a critical analysis of butoh will be further contextualised within western contemporary dance training approaches, to expand upon those certain avant-garde and postmodern developments of the late 1960s in dance presented in the previous chapter, which can be seen to have affected a shift away from dance for production purposes towards solo research inquiry and political performance expression. In aligning butoh to certain initiatives within contemporary western dance theatre pedagogy, I consider the shift from a range of contemporary form-based movement techniques which can be followed, copied and accurately replicated in the body of the dance student, towards a conscious expression of movement that is cultivated out of a dialogue existing between internalised sensibilities and externalised movement forms. Citing my own personal training experiences, I will consider the relationship of physical and aesthetic consciousness in the interface between butoh research in training and its presentation in performance.

Thus the following chapter will draw on, and record discursively, elements from my first-hand experiences of researching some of the learning conditions pertaining to physical and perceptual consciousness established for butoh movement at Su-En's studio in Sweden (1999-2002), and also Minako Seki's studio in Berlin (2005) while further distilling those principles in relation to my evolving practice as an independent choreographer and performance maker.



## RECEPTIVE STATES: *training methods and their application*

Dance training in its widest definition refers to the digestion, appropriation and physical acquisition of a particular movement technique or sensibility. Certain ‘hidden’ receptive activities are arguably contained within the immediate experiential learning environment, where individual physiological processes such as corporeal memory, muscular control and kinetic coordination, prioritise visual and sensorial stimulation over cerebral understanding. In such a way, the cultivation of formal dance learning practices can be described as dependent on a series of physiological and cognitive processes. These processes follow empiricist notions of knowledge practices in developing out of non conclusive, experiential and individual modes of recognition. Emilyn Claid, writing in 2006, outlines a pedagogic application of individually contested signature practices within conventional western theatrical dance training. Here, she suggests, the acquisition of a performance aesthetic in traditional dance methods, must follow a reflective process, working from an externalised (visual) process to an internalised (sensorial) one:

The codified dance performance techniques have brand names such as Cecchetti (ballet), Russian ballet, Cunningham and Graham. Each training technique is also the performance form, the training being a compilation of adapted phrases of movement from already performed and dated choreographies. Dancers learn each technique by embodying the external representation of the performed language. These are the mirror-reflected languages, working from the external images to the internal kinaesthetic.<sup>104</sup>

Where the cognitive process starts externally and moves inward, becoming embedded through disciplined repetition, the above description implies a reciprocal engagement in the dancer which presupposes already present sensibilities that are enacted upon through a reflective process, where the dance student initially copies or mimics those external forms presented. However, where the majority of training processes surrounding formal western dance pedagogy follow such a process, I propose that the role of the dance student might remain predisposed towards certain evaluative mechanisms aligned to individual modes of recognition within the physical acquisition of any new movement technique. Claid’s use of visual metaphor here suggests that the dance student might strive initially to produce an exact replica of those taught movements through a

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<sup>104</sup> Claid, E. ‘Letting Go of the Mirror’ in *Yes? no! maybe: seductive ambiguity in dance* (London: Routledge, 2007), 80.

mirroring process. Arguably, where the above model might also involve interpretative and assimilative strategies on the part of the dance student, in the case of western traditional dance studies, the cognitive process which the dancer student is engaged in must also contend with a set of assumptions regarding the trained dancer, often underpinned with a set of aesthetic ideals, as discussed in the previous chapter. The following section will introduce my own formal training experiences in Decroux Mime Technique, as a means to further critique the role of self-reflective pedagogy.

The architecture of the mime body operates from an axial structure, dividing the three dimensional frame into a series of body parts all operating both independently and interdependently within an overall governing system of kinetic logic. Similar to the codified gestural language of classical ballet, Etienne Decroux, working in France during the early part of the twentieth century, cultivated a highly refined formal movement expression, based on the technical presentation of a range of precise bodily articulations that, he argued, could be ascribed to distinct emotional and psychological states, as represented within the context of theatrical expression.<sup>105</sup> Decroux developed a precise gestural repertoire based on a series of scales which worked on the various anatomical axes of head, chest, torso, solar plexus and pelvis, emphasising an exacting muscular control over the individual joints and limbs of the body in order to articulate specific physical states which can be seen to convey a whole repertoire of theatrical expressions as well as establishing a performer's status on stage. By assigning the role of each body part and their interrelation to a particular emotion or psychological condition, the external attitude of the body can be seen to correspond to an equivalent internal attitude of mind. For example, he identified thirty-two distinct articulations of the neck, each inclination denoting a particular emotion or attitude. Elsewhere, Decroux would ascribe elemental or animalistic terms to denote specific movement states, for example, 'Salamander' (lizard) and 'Coquillage' (shell) denote two opposing positions of the hands - one concave and one convex. By asserting that each movement enunciation corresponds to a particular human condition, as informed by his close observation of socio-cultural physical behaviour, Decroux's methods provide his audience with a thorough anatomical dissection of the performer's body. Thomas Leabhart (1989) describes the exactitude of each physical gesture on stage achieved by Decroux's company members in performance:

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<sup>105</sup> Studies of this form are taken from my undergraduate training experiences studying Decroux Mime technique at the Amsterdam Theatre School *Hoge Skool voor de Kunsten*, Aug - Dec. 1995.

Each second of the approximately seven minutes required to perform each piece was exactly choreographed in terms of line, dynamic quality, facial expression, breath and weight, and not a single placement of head, hands, or feet was arbitrary.<sup>106</sup>

My training experiences in Decroux Mime Technique, participating in daily classes over a three month period in Amsterdam, can be described as equally balanced between the externalised cognitive process of mirroring and the development of internalised kinaesthetic sensations. Through detailed observation and disciplined repetition, this movement repertoire gradually became cultivated in my body, while my dependence on the role of the visual and aural – external - stimuli lessened as my kinaesthetic understanding of the movement increased, thus subscribing to Claid's identification of the receptive process in the dance student within Western classical modernist and expressionist movement languages as 'working from the external images to the internal kinaesthetic'<sup>107</sup>. In such a way, Decroux's method indicates that the cognitive process might operate, in the mime student, as a fluid translation between inner consciousness and outward bodily expression. Notably, however, my perceptive awareness was notably challenged as, following three months of daily training, our teacher produced a mirror as a visual reference. In this instance, the effect of witnessing my projected image served not only to confuse any kinaesthetic understanding of those movements in the moment of their execution, thereby engendering an immediate sense of mistrust in the reflected image (and a subsequent doubting of my own internalised learning methods), but the apparent separation I experienced between the image presented and the corporeal gesture now reflected appeared to signal a loss of authorship in the translation between perception, kinaesthetic sensation, muscular articulation and performance expression. This somewhat unnerving experience was formative in cultivating a strong belief that, in order to progress further in my dance training, I needed to evolve further the role of physical consciousness in order to strengthen connections between generating movement from internal kinaesthetic to external (reflected) image and vice versa.

Although at first observation, many of the processes involved in training the mime student can be seen as similar to butoh in developing a constant dialogue between

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<sup>106</sup> Leabhart, T. *Modern and Postmodern Mime* (London, Macmillan Education Ltd, 1989), 50.

<sup>107</sup> Claid 2006: 80

internal image and external form, whereas the mime artist delineates a particular landscape by tracing its outlines, its depth, texture and surface details, the butoh performer might allude to a landscape by associative means - through its smells, colours or atmosphere. Imperative to the distinction of butoh and mime is the process of transformation between image and form in butoh. While the mime student aims to relay in aesthetic consciousness an exact transmission of an image, thus displaying the imagination through movements which can be readily interpreted according to the conscious articulation or formation of that image, both image and form are in constant communication in the transformation of physical consciousness in butoh - which are essentially removed from specific human states. Thus, when the butoh performer does communicate human states, it is as a result of an aesthetic consciousness twinned with physical consciousness, rather than his or her direct engagement with humanistic images.<sup>108</sup>

### **TRANSFORMATIONAL BODIES: *cognitive training methods***

The study of consciousness in performance is the subject of many recent writings on the subject of contemporary actor and dancer training. Phillip Zarrilli, developing an ethnographically informed account of training forms within Indian Kathakali Dance Drama<sup>109</sup>, has written at some length on the synthesis between sensation, muscular or corporeal memory and cognition within the context of registering new movement systems and principles, in what he terms the 'psycho-physical' body.

Perhaps our task, then, in the studio, is to “practice metaphysics,” i.e., to thoughtfully tease out in our specific modes of embodiment the assumptions and presuppositions about the body, mind, “self,” and “action” that are at “play” there, informing what we do and how we do it. That means systematic exploration of the nature of the bodymind, our consciousness, and our “selves,” not as an empty “academic” or intellectual exercise, but as an active experience “on the edge of the absent” – that place where we risk losing our craft, and our selves.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> This concept will be further enlarged in Chapter Three within an analysis of Butoh performer Ko Murobushi's solo work 'Edge'. In particular the relation between aesthetic and physical consciousness will be explored in relation to the notion of what I term the 'holographic body' in Ko's butoh performance.

<sup>109</sup> Zarrilli, P., 'Theoretical Framework: an ethnography of the body in practice' in *When the body becomes all eyes: Paradigms, Discourses and Practices of Power in Kalaripayattu, a South Indian Martial Art* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>110</sup> Zarrilli, P. 'The Metaphysical Studio' in *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 46 (2) 2002: 164

Viewed in the context of Hay's work, by simultaneously addressing the roles of dancer, choreographer, audience and artist, the role of perceptual consciousness inferred here by Zarrilli implies a variety of authorial roles for the individual practitioner. Later in this section, I will extend this model for the self advocating practitioner in examining a similar mode of reflexive inquiry through movement improvisation in relation to what butoh dancer Yoko Ashikawa describes of Hijikata's training, as the 'objective body'. The internal series of dialogues that exist between 'body', 'mind', 'self' and 'action' put forward by Zarrilli here, indicate clear reference points from which to engage those separate yet interrelated processes of generating and refining movement material. The processes involved in the production of movement material, then, can be said to constantly engage in a double exposure between those movements generated within improvisatory states and those means of physicalizing or actualizing these images and experiences in movement. However, Zarrilli's suggestion that in order to systematically explore the nature of consciousness, we might arrive "on the edge of the absent", presents a paradox where he equates self identity with form or 'craft' - the lack thereof, thus implying an absence or loss. At this point, the term 'physical consciousness' might provide a useful site on which to further debate such a dualistic notion, and furthermore, as a premise from which to explore more fully the role of consciousness in butoh training.

Consciousness arrives as a result of each individual's brain and bodily functions, there can be no direct or collective sharing of that individual's unique and historical conscious experience.<sup>111</sup>

The ability of the dancer to maintain a conscious awareness of the perceptive mode is, I argue, a prerequisite in the context of both butoh training and performance, pertaining to explicit kinetic and distilled perceptual modes of behaviour. 'Perceptual consciousness'<sup>112</sup> can be described as reciprocal sensorial perception, occurring in the present moment while also implying the emergence of further (future) sensations or forms in the body. Theatre practitioner Rebecca Loukes, researching into Eva Grindler's psycho-physical movement training methods in the early twentieth century in Germany,

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<sup>111</sup> Edelman, G. M. *Wider than the Sky: A Revolutionary View of Consciousness* (London: Penguin 2004), 6.

<sup>112</sup> Lingis, A. *Foreign Bodies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995)

describes how the speculative proprioceptive mode employed by her dancers does not necessarily separate the present from the future: 'Being fully rooted in the action of a certain movement allows for the potential to reflect in that same moment - the reflection need not be disconnected'<sup>113</sup>. Similarly, Foster asserts of Deborah Hay's movement 'the possibility of a consciously aware and critically reflective corporeality'.<sup>114</sup> Loukes, Hay and Zarrilli all point to the necessity in performance to remain fully aware at all times of the internal processing of a series of images, their manifestation in physical form and the presence of the audience. A hyper-consciousness is called for here, in order for the performer to operate clear exchanges between internalised sensations, movement impulses, choreographic composition and communicative processes. These interrelated sites of engagement can be argued to operate within a distinct dissipated temporal state, not dissimilar to the ability of the butoh performer to address many images simultaneously in performance, whilst activating separate movement impulses and sensations – a process that I chose to term 'physical synaesthesia'. I suggest that the relation between physical consciousness and physical synaesthesia is an essential component of the long and complex process of butoh training.

Butoh training can be seen as the gradual forming of a question in the body. This question does not seek answers as found in the articulate aesthetic forms of ballet or other shape-shifting movement languages, but rather the long term process of butoh training serves only to expand and deepen the length of that question.<sup>115</sup>

If, as I suggest at the start of this writing, training refers to the appropriation and physical manifestation of a previously 'unknown' form, then Baskerville (1997), writing on the specificity of butoh training, proposes how the gradual evolution of this dance expression in the body might be seen to follow a lateral rather than linear progression. Rather than present an inquiry here into the effects of butoh training on the body per se, isolated points of discovery surrounding the confrontation of the butoh student with different living matter will be examined, advocating a radical remapping of the dance body based on its ability to change perception of its three dimensional form.<sup>116</sup> Such a

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<sup>113</sup> Loukes, R. 'Tracing Bodies: Researching Psychophysical Training for Performance Through Practice' in *Performance Research Journal* 8(4) Taylor and Francis Ltd 2003:56

<sup>114</sup> Foster 2000: xviii

<sup>115</sup> Baskerville 1997: 37

<sup>116</sup> I refer here to choreographer Deborah Hay's description of the relationship between the dancer's three dimensional form and its sensitivity to both the surrounding relation to space and to other

claim supports Japanese critic Kuniyoshi's claim that 'Butoh is not only performance, but also the embodiment of one of the most precise critical spirits in the history of the consciousness of the body'<sup>117</sup> and will be further examined below. While there is still no formal pedagogy that can be ascribed to butoh, since the death of Hijikata in 1984, it could be argued that the name has become synonymous with a number of performing arts as his disciples have evolved the dance from Hijikata's teachings to encompass various new forms. Nowadays butoh has found its roots within a widely scattered lineage, as the early 1980s saw many Japanese butoh artists seek new directives in Europe and the US, while many visiting western artists spent several years undergoing strict training and mentoring programs with butoh artists in Japan. Such individual directives and exchanges have not eroded Hijikata's legacy, but rather can be seen to reflect the strengths of those autonomous and independent responses that this particular movement expression demands of its dancers. While I maintain a critical distance from the position of ethnographer in defining my terms of initial reception as a student of butoh through a phenomenological inquiry into some of those physiological processes engaged in through the appropriation of this Japanese dance art, a socio-cultural outline of butoh since its emergence in post war Japan is initially useful here.

### **Radical Repertoires: *a History and Lineage of Butoh***

Butoh is not only performance, but also the embodiment of one of the most precise critical spirits in the history of the consciousness of the body.<sup>118</sup>

Although inspired and developed within the cultural context of post war Japan, Butoh has gained recognition as an important contribution to contemporary dance and performance art throughout the US and Europe, echoing developments in western postmodern art. The obvious implications of such a parallel emerge out of the fundamentally anarchistic nature of butoh in opposing the very establishment of, on the one hand, the aesthetical and philosophical values upheld by the more traditional

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dancer's bodies, based on the perceptions of their own physical limitations - 'Thank Heavens for the limitations of the three dimensional body that allows us to play' (Taken from workshop with Deborah Hay, The Connected Body Symposium, School of New Dance Development, Amsterdam, June 2005).

<sup>117</sup> Kuniyoshi, K., *Butoh in the Late 1980's*, (trans. Richard Hart) 1989 p.6. For fuller guidance see: [www.xs4all.nl/~iddinja/butoh](http://www.xs4all.nl/~iddinja/butoh)

<sup>118</sup> Ibid

Japanese dance forms of Noh and Kabuki, while, on the other, proving a rejection of the emerging westernised Japanese dance body as heavily influenced by the sudden cultural proliferation of imported western ballet schools following the defeat of Japan at the hands of America post World War Two.

As various studies indicate, the 1950s represented a turning point in Japanese culture as the country underwent a slow transition from old traditional value systems towards western democratic ones. While dance had previously existed mainly in the distinct forms of Kagura (folk dance), Bugaku (court dance dating from the seventh century) and Noh (classical drama and dance form, founded at the end of the fourteenth century), Japan now experienced a proliferation of American and European styled ballet and modern dance academies, while artists such as poet Yukio Mishima and theatre director Tadashi Suzuki subverted their respective traditions of literature and theatre, embracing the avant-garde rejection of traditional cultural values. While Suzuki and Mishima's works can be seen to represent a minority of artistic expression, their performance research holds notable influence within current cross cultural debates in contemporary performance culture, as Paul Allain notes in 2002:

With the influence of writers like Beckett, the existential philosophies of Jean Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty arrived in Japan and were taken up avidly by students in the 1960s. In *The Way of Acting* Suzuki is explicit about his attraction to Sartre. Less obvious is the inspiration he drew from Merleau-Ponty and especially his book *Phenomenology of Perception*. This text accorded with Suzuki's theatrical impulses and with his later attempt to locate perception in the self reflexive corporeal body, be it of the performer or spectator.<sup>119</sup>

The dancer Tatsumi Hijikata was the leading figure in what he termed Ankoko Butoh - the dance of darkness - and his dance sought a new expression aligned with a modern Japanese identity. During one of Hijikata's first public performances, 'Kinjiki' ('Forbidden Colours') in 1959, dancer Yoshito Ohno (son to Kazuo Ohno) performs a sacrificial rite in which a live chicken is strangled between his thighs, marking the birth of butoh as an anarchistic and subversive dance form which distilled the spirit of the times in a fragmented, nihilistic, ironic and deconstructive approach to dance. Based on a novel by Japanese novelist Yushio Mishima, 'Kinjiki' exposed a dark eroticism which is reported to have divided public and art critics alike and ensured butoh's

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<sup>119</sup> Allain, P., *The Art of Stillness: The Theatre Practice of Tadashi Suzuki* (London: Methuen Press, 2002), 18



removal from the respectable stages of Tokyo's dance academies and theatres. According to Holborn (1987) while forging a new identity for butoh within Japan, German expressionist dance was to play an important role in the cultivation of Ohno and Hijikata's corporeal expression where both were initially influenced by modern dancer Takaya Eguchi, one of Mary Wigman's disciples. A student of pioneering modern dancer Rudolph Laban, Wigman's preoccupation with eastern mysticism prompted her 1926 solo performance, *Witch Dance*, which explores the raw expression of dance, echoing primal rhythms in natural movements which reflect a similar aesthetic to those found within butoh.

Born in 1906, Kazuo Ohno followed a highly disciplined training in athletics, while continuing to take dance classes with Eguchi, however, his dance training was interrupted in 1938 as he was conscripted during World War Two. Ohno returned to dance almost a decade later, and continued to dedicate almost a century to generating butoh performance works, many of which have gained worldwide recognition, most notably through his almost obsessive preoccupation with the Spanish dancer La Argentina in 1929, whose work created a lasting impression, leading to Ohno's solo tribute almost 50 years later.<sup>120</sup> As a dedicated Christian, Ohno emphasizes a spiritual application of butoh as a transformative power, capable of transcending his aged and emasculated body. Works such as 'Suriens' (Lillies, 1987) and 'My Mother' (1981) emphasise an excessive feminine fragility and unconventional sexuality (Franko 1995), while simultaneously evoking incarnations of various birth/death cycles. Ohno points out that, while the epic scale of his works often hold strong redemptive values, their cathartic effect can be witnessed in their inevitable recognition and acceptance of one's individual fate: 'In terms of the mournful nature of butoh there is an element of catharsis which is closer to mourning than to complete and utter resignation. First you enter into a world of darkness and from that point you seek joy, happiness and satisfaction.'<sup>121</sup> In contrast, Hijikata has been described as the 'Architect of Butoh'<sup>122</sup>, who's brief but charged appearance across Japanese theatres, nightclubs and underground galleries and art clubs left a startling legacy and a community of fiercely dedicated followers from across a range of arts disciplines. Many of Hijikata's early performance events emerged alongside experimental films such as Nagisa Oshima's 'Diary of a Shinjuku Thief', or

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<sup>120</sup> Franko 1995: 100-107.

<sup>121</sup> Kazuo Ohno interview in *Piercing the Mask* dir. Richard Moore. Ronin Films, Australia, 1991.

<sup>122</sup> Masson-Sekine, N. & Viala, J. *Butoh: shades of darkness*. Shufunotomo: Japan, 1988.

alongside Tokyo's underground Theatre Group, Tenjosajiki. Stephen Barber (2006) describes how Hijikata deliberately exalted the 'dirty avant-garde' with its morbid obsession with themes of sex and death and provocative use of bad taste.<sup>123</sup> Many of Hijikata's collaborative performance interventions were staged in what Barber describes as the charged and dingy atmospheres of Tokyo's underground nightclub scene and his disciples were often ostracized from their immediate families, forming instead a close community whose lives were irrevocably bound up with performing butoh as a way of life. However, Barber further points out that, although Japan's attempts to project a modernised image of Japan as a sanitized industrial progressive society clearly provided Hijikata with a fertile ground in which to root his Ankoko Butoh, though he could not have failed to be aware of the political climate in which his dance emerged, his immediate concerns were allied to corporeal rather than political transgression.

Hijikata's artistic influences can be clearly traced to the writings of Marquis de Sade and Jean Genet. In particular, he adopted Genet's 'The Maids' as inspiration for a series of cross gender enactments as well as using Artaud's final radio recordings as a kind of sonic autopsy in one of his solo works. Today, much of Hijikata's legacy remains within photo documents - a tribute to his long lasting relationship with both the Japanese poet and performance artist Mishima and Hijikata's wife, Akiko Motofuji.<sup>124</sup> It is interesting to note how such graphic illustration has attracted widespread critical interest within contemporary western theatrical discourse over the past half century, much of which would appear to be orientated to a spectator-deployed analysis of piecemeal visual remnants of Hijikata's work rather than engaging in either his myriad writings or those ensuing philosophies and physical principles generated within continuing butoh praxis today. While serving to preserve its cultural and political legacy, such a western spectator positioning of butoh was key in influencing how early staged works were represented within an international scene, meeting with certain scepticism in Japan.<sup>125</sup>

Much debate has been generated during the past two decades on the lineage of butoh from its roots in post-nuclear Japan to what has become a gradual dissemination of this

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<sup>123</sup> Barber 2006: 62-63.

<sup>124</sup> In 1961 Mishima commissioned a series of photographs by Eiko Hosoe, a leading Japanese photographer, for his book, *Barakei*. This collaboration extended to the long term documentation of Hijikata and other Butoh dancer's work (for further explanation see Holborn et al 1987:11)

<sup>125</sup> Kuniyoshi:1989

art form into western theatre and dance practices, finding resonance within the currents of experimental dance, dance theatre and performance art. During the 1960s artists were highly politically active in Japan, divided in a debate over the increasing valorisation of traditional arts practices in what Kuniyoshi (1989) terms ‘nostalgic tribute’, and the desire to construct a modern expression which rejected established performance traditions such as Noh and Kabuki. The years immediately following the end of World War II brought about increasing urbanisation within Japan. Coupled with a newly imposed aspiration towards an Americanised democracy, new constitution and new civil law, this radical cultural transition caused opposition among those artists searching for a new way to express some of the concerns of the time. While butoh’s migration from within its own conventional theatrical expression is clearly evidenced through influences from contemporary western literary and dance movement, any further speculation on butoh in the context of the European and American postmodernist movement must acknowledge the literal migration of a severed community of butoh artists from their country to the US and Europe, following the sudden death of Hijikata in 1986. Indeed, Carol Martin’s term ‘migrating cultures’<sup>126</sup> might be employed here to help identify some of the intrinsic paradoxes and contradictions that occur in the transplant of certain defining influences of the western avant-garde to Japanese butoh. The notion of a Western avant-garde is of particular relevance in the case of butoh - a relatively ‘short-term’ tradition whose legacy is determined by what Kuniyoshi (1989) terms a ‘variegated genealogy’, and whose evolution spans just four decades and as many continents since its birth within a volatile and culturally fragmented climate. While Hijikata’s own performance legacies will be further examined in Chapter Three, the following section introduces my first-hand experiences of researching some of the learning conditions pertaining to physical and perceptual consciousness established for butoh movement at Su-En’s studio in Sweden (1999-2002), while further distilling those principles in relation to a range of contemporary movement training approaches.

### **Su-En *Butoh Teaching Method***

Whereas western institutionally established dance education methods might presume a clear evolution from student to paid, contractual performer to teacher/choreographer,

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<sup>126</sup> Martin: 1996

there is no one school of thought or formal pedagogical structure surrounding the evolution of butoh. Throughout its forty year history, and following the migration of Japanese butoh artists to Europe and America in the late 1980s, the prevailing teaching methods of this dance form have developed through collective workshop training experiences. Second and third generation butoh artists continue to make work in isolation, often within small interdisciplinary contexts, while spreading their respective knowledge practises through both performing and teaching internationally in intensive workshop programs. One such artist is Swedish butoh dancer Suzanna Akerlund, Su-En, who was based in Japan between 1986 and 1994. Su-En spent five years studying under Tomoe Shizune, artistic director of the *Hakutobo* group, originally formed by the founder of Butoh, Tatsumi Hijikata. In addition, she trained under Hijikata's long term collaborator Yoko Ashikawa (who provided her with her Japanese name) and was a member of her company *Gnome*. In 1992, Su-En Butoh Company was founded in Tokyo as a daughter group to Tomoe Shizune & *Hakutobo*. Following this period of intensive training in Japan, Su-En transferred her butoh research to her native Sweden, where she has spent over a decade developing from those cultural principles, a holistic training and performance system, cultivated in response to those specific environmental conditions present at her artistic headquarters in Almunge, Uppsala - a small remote village just north of Stockholm. Su-En describes how the learning processes of butoh might take up to 10 years - 5 years to understand a movement philosophy and another 5 to evolve this understanding physically.<sup>127</sup>

Within butoh training, the student is encouraged to interrogate the body's conditioned kinetic responses in order to relearn potential movement patterns. Such a reassessment of the body's capabilities has implications on how the student perceives his or her own body, as Japanese butoh dancer and writer Nanako Kurihara describes of her training experiences with Yoko Ashikawa's butoh company, Hakutobo:

As infants we do not perceive our own body distinct from other things. Through interacting with the world, our perceptions become differentiated. In butoh one must question not only one's own institutionalised movements but also one's perception of the body itself.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Taken from non published statement by SU-EN disclosed within her butoh training workshop, Haglund Skola, Sweden, 2001.

<sup>128</sup> Kurihara, N. *The most critical thing in the Universe: Analysis of the work of Tatsumi Hijikata*. New York University. Published PhD Thesis UMI Press, 1996 p. 99.

Interestingly, the relationship between externalised image and internalised kinaesthetic here contrasts with Claid's earlier description (Claid 2006: 80) in prioritising the role of internal perceptions.

There is no mirror in the studio. In butoh, unlike western dance styles, the dancer's inner sense of the body is emphasised over its outer appearance. Using the teacher's eyes as a mirror, the student learns the movements through his internal sense of body. He defines his body from its internal perceptions, and controls it in this way, concentrating inwardly instead of being concerned with his outward visual appearance.<sup>129</sup>

The Japanese character for butoh consists of two elements: *Bu* - dance and *toh* - step, or, literally: stamping dance.<sup>130</sup> Such a body appears directly opposed to western classical dance movement where, as Claid points out, '(t)he abstract imagery of the upward vertical line moving from the 'lowly and bad' pleasures of the body to the 'high and good' conceptual pleasures of the mind is a concern that travels through the centuries of Western philosophy and culture.<sup>131</sup> In contrast, the butoh dancer uses the central force of energy lying low in the body, the legs spreading like roots into the ground, while the arms are controlled by imagistic impulses that move through the body from beneath the ground. Such an inversion of Western classical architectural forms found in Claid's description above, has implications on the role of the mind or intellect in relation to its corporeal counterpart, as the head is given less significance in proportion to the pelvis and 'roots' of the body. Subsequently, the thinking body in butoh could be said to take its direction from the proprioceptive role of the muscles, nerves and senses as from a cognitive understanding. Such a distribution of energy is similar to many East Asian dance and martial art forms, where the focus as the centre of strength is situated just below the navel, and the legs are slightly bent to connect hips with knee joints; knees with the soles of the feet, and the feet with the earth.

Su-En's first stages of training, 'The Natural Body', aim to create a heightened awareness of the body's relationship to gravity through attempting to find a paradoxical state of passive alertness by allowing natural gravitational forces to work on the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid:109

<sup>130</sup> Kobo Butoh Company, 'Butoh Dance of Darkness' in *NAMA* Vol 2, Badron, San Francisco, 1998: 19.

<sup>131</sup> Claid, 2007: 21

muscular structure of the body. Through investigating everyday movements such as walking, sitting and lying down, the student is encouraged to find a sense of neutral balance - a kind of 'emptying' of all unnecessary muscular control to utilise the bare minimum effort required for these positions. Such an emptying out subscribes to Hijikata's notion of the 'objective body', following a Japanese phenomenological approach to the body, as outlined here by Yasuo Yuasa, who develops the minimalist concept of Japanese Noh theatre performer Zeami's 'no-mind':

In the state of no-mind, the subjective-objective ambiguity between one's mind and body disappears, and the body as an object is made completely subjective [...]. The bodily form dancing on a stage signifies, at the same time, the mind just as it is. In the active state of body-mind identity, the ambiguous dichotomy of the body disappears.<sup>132</sup>

By de-familiarising the body with its usual physiological functions, the student must relearn the maximum physical possibilities of movement in every limb.<sup>133</sup> Yoko Ashikawa once described Hijikata's process of objectifying the body in butoh, where he would encourage his students to study the functions of the body with the innocence of a young child in investigating the physical limits of each separate body part and its function in his training:

He used the metaphor of a meal for dancers served on a plate, on which were placed the dancers liver, lungs and heart. The plate was wide and shallow, and the dancer was encouraged to play with the organs and examine them. This is something that children do unconsciously; they play with the parts of their bodies in order to recognize them [...]. He would often say 'let your hand do this' or 'let your leg do this' in contrast to the usual designated functions of the limb.<sup>134</sup>

To engage in Su-En's work might be described as an attempt to consciously reverse the normative proprioceptive functions of the body's socio-physiological construct. Her specific treatment of the proprioceptive functions requires an investigation into the conditions of our socially constructed patterns of daily movements - how the body orientates itself in society where it 'possesses the power of reacting to gravity, inertia and momentum, the primary forces of the physical world, by means of that part of the

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<sup>132</sup> Yuasa, Y., *The Body, Towards an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* (Albany Suny Press, 1987), 109

<sup>133</sup> Such a notion links to a cybernetic model in regarding the body as a transformative and adaptable entity: 'It is no longer meaningful to see the body as a site for the psyche but rather as a structure [...]. Altering the architecture of the body results in adjusting its awareness of the world.' Stelarc *Psycho/Cyber: Event for Muscle and Machine* (program note from Hamino Complex, Den Bosch, NE, 1995.)

<sup>134</sup> Holborn, 1987:16

nervous system known as proprioceptive, or “perceiving the self”[...]’<sup>135</sup>. Hijikata once described his movement practice as deriving from a sense of ‘crisis in the body’<sup>136</sup>, where constant physical tension is maintained between opposing states. He described how, when his body would fall to the floor, his dead sister would stand up in his body-when he stood up, her body would lie down.<sup>137</sup> This maxim is clearly visible in Su-En’s performance ‘Scrap Bodies’<sup>138</sup>, during which she falls continuously towards the final ten minutes of the performance, crashing to the floor only to return to standing using what appears to be minimal muscular force. Similarly, within ‘The Natural Body’ training, her teachings encouraged us to find a way to move to the floor at the slowest possible speed, in order to fully investigate the structure of the legs and pelvis which might find a way to fold underneath the body. Within this exercise, the dancer is forced to confront directly physical barriers, reaching their ‘limit’ of flexibility, or strength. At this point, the application of further imagery to create the sensation of lightness, such as the image of the space around the body consisting of water or dense molecules, becomes necessary in order to continue to move downwards. In contrast, the use of falling within Release-based contemporary dance technique<sup>139</sup> provides support for the dancer by emphasising the use of suspension and lightness in the body as well utilising momentum in order to fall to the ground. In my experience, the two approaches are diametrically opposed, as one resists the impact of gravity until the last possible moment through applying the sensation or image of suspension, then uses the natural return of weight in the form of rebound, to regain a standing position. Butoh, on the other hand, applies the contrasting image of standing/recovering simultaneously to falling which produces a physical paradox in the body. The presence of physical effort evident in butoh appears to directly challenge Foster’s earlier description of the virtuosic and gravity-defying ballet dancer (Foster 1996) in no longer disguising dance’s labouring force, therefore ‘troubl(ing) the performative boundaries that separate labouring novice and transcendent virtuosic hero’<sup>140</sup>. Dance ethnographer Judith Hamera’s debate on virtuosity and labour in butoh will be further considered in a

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<sup>135</sup> Todd-Elmsworthy 1973: 27

<sup>136</sup> Hijikata, T. in *The Drama Review* (ed) Schechner, R. Vol. 44 Spring (New York: New York University, 2000), 36 – 42.

<sup>137</sup> Masson-Sekine, N. & Viala, J. *Butoh: shades of darkness* (Shufunotomo: Japan, 1988), 88

<sup>138</sup> ‘Scrap Bodies’ solo butoh performance. Seattle Butoh Festival 1997.

<sup>139</sup> Eric Hawkins and Doris Humphries represent two defining signature practices in twentieth century dance technique, where common to both is the establishment of a conscious relationship with gravity that emphasises the use of breath, contraction and suspension in moving down to the floor and returning to standing.

<sup>140</sup> Hamera 2000: 144

spectator analysis of Japanese performer Ko Murobushi's solo work 'Edge' in the following chapter.

The notion of physical paradox can be applied to what Yuasa terms of Zeami's 'body dichotomy' above, where 'the body as an object is made completely subjective'<sup>141</sup>. In order to achieve a sensation of lightness in her training method, Su-En would apply the image of a mosquito, with soft hanging legs on a supported, light frame. She would suggest threads connecting the limbs out into space, so that the image was one of suspension, being moved by the surrounding air or wind. A distinct realisation of the separation between body and mind arose one day as I was fully immersed in the sensation of this hanging, weightless body, yet at the same time I registered the sound of my feet as they impacted on the floor. The sound of my feet hitting the floor at that moment appeared to completely contradict the sensation of weightlessness that I was experiencing – as though in fact the body's materiality was conflicting with what the mind's understanding of the body was at that point, turning Yuasa's statement around, so that I had the impression of the body as subject made completely objective.

Cultural theorist Brian Massumi (2002) suggests that a body in motion creates multiplicitous sites of potential movement directives, signifying any amount of possibilities for movement in any direction:

Take movement: when a body is in motion, it does not coincide with itself. It coincides with its own transition: its own variation. The range of variations it can be implicated in is not present in any given moment, much less in any position it passes through. In motion a body is an immediate, unfolding relation to its own nonpresent potential to vary.<sup>142</sup>

Similarly to Massumi's proposition here for potential multiple movement variations, the 'emptying out' of the body that Su-En refers to does not imply an unconscious or diminished movement state, but rather, by minimising the muscular control of the limbs, daily actions such as walking, sitting, or hanging are revisited and interrogated to find the most effective way to move, in effect, achieving an available and hyper aware movement state which enables the body to move in any direction at any given time. Such an interrogation of some of the underlying principles of daily movement echoes that of Hay and her contemporaries in seeking to 'cultivate the differentiatedness of

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<sup>141</sup> Yuasa 1997:109

<sup>142</sup> Massumi, B. *Movement, Affect, Sensation: Parables for the Virtual*, Duke University Press, 2002.



body – the many distinctive possibilities for physical articulation – and the attentiveness required to track and take note of the body's inclinations.'<sup>143</sup> By investigating multiple movement possibilities and coordinates in every limb, kinetic impulses found in the organisation of the musculature structure are interrogated, facilitating certain gravitational directives that enable the dancer to attain momentum, balance and coordination in articulating shape and rhythm in space. I argue that the particular tension that is apparent in watching a butoh performer's movement can be said to occur as the result of this reappraisal of the physiological and kinetic conditioning of the body's normative proprioceptive functions. To achieve this awareness in movement requires an ability to discern multiple sets of movement possibilities as in Massumi's description of multiplicitous movement above, from limb to limb, or from skin to bone, with the aim of producing an 'available body' and will be further examined in relation to a series of butoh training exercises below.

#### **MINAKO SEKI: *the inbetween body***

Initially, I identify here certain bodily states and physical sensibilities inherent to butoh, as developed out of training with second generation butoh dancer Minako Seki.<sup>144</sup> While Minako's work is primarily studio-based, the initial definitions of different qualitative physical states located within her training provide here a useful premise from which to further articulate a distinct movement vocabulary as applied to my site-based choreographic research in Chapter Four. In January 2004 I participated in a one month intensive dance workshop with Seki, in which I developed a series of writing responses to the daily training program. These written responses continued in the form of a written dialogue with Seki which evolved over the following ten months and prompted a further invitation to return as 'Writer in Residence' in December 2005, to collate research on the subject of butoh training. Twelve dancers participated in a month long intensive residency at Seki's studio in Berlin during which the writing evolved from written responses from the dancers in the form of diaries, notations and illustrations which provided me with different perspectives to develop further writings on Seki's teaching

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<sup>143</sup> Foster 2000:xiii

<sup>144</sup> Born in Nagasaki in following the defeat of Japan in World War Two, Seki is described as a 'second generation' butoh artist and has been making experimental collaborative butoh performance work at her base in Berlin for over 15 years. In 1987 she co-founded 'Danse Theater Grotesque' with Yumiko Yoshioko and Kim Itoh and since 1996 she has been concentrating on solo works and also as a director and choreographer in collaborative projects.

methodology. The writing also provided the research tools to facilitate regular discussions and debate that fed back into Seki's teaching process. Thus, the research evolved through a symbiotic exchange between studio investigations and written inquiry. These research findings were disseminated through a public presentation of Seki's teaching and performance work and in the form of an illustrated lecture which I presented as part of a public presentation at the culmination of this residency in Berlin.

Seki's pedagogic approach draws on Noguchi gymnastics as a preparatory exploration of the effects of gravity on the body. Developed contemporaneously to butoh, Michizo Noguchi's technique is an introspective approach to movement, based on a thorough exploration of gravity using minimal muscular control.<sup>145</sup> The workshops were conducted in English and comprised an international group, so the main languages spoken during these discussions were English, German and Japanese. Notably, attempts to locate definitions of many of the physical terms of engagement within these three languages differed considerably; giving rise to the discovery that language contains its own distinct cultural investments surrounding the body. Thus, the following is a translation of some of the key descriptions of Seki's development of different sense qualities or sensory bodies, as developed through participant-observer methods and further debated through shared dialogue:

### **The Inbetween Body and the Forgetting Walk**

*The task is to simply move from A to B, then, half way, to forget where the initial direction was leading and turn back. Keep repeating this exercise gradually minimising the distance from A to B while simultaneously changing the two points in space each time. The feeling of forgetting intensifies as the distance in between the two points decreases. Contained within these constant starts and stops is an increasing sense of disorientation.*

Where the butoh dancer can be said to operate manifold movements using several simultaneous impulses, the 'forgetting walk' develops a more literal response to this contradictory movement states as the 'in-between body' is constantly caught in between two opposing impulses or directions. Seki suggests that butoh operates like a dance without full stops – before the end of each sentence in the body another sentence has already begun. The forgetting body is a paradoxical movement state, perpetually following then contradicting an impulse. Within the above exercise a constant tension is maintained, increasing as the external directives become internalised. Below in a written

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<sup>145</sup> Fraleigh 2006:155

response referencing my immediate sensations to the interaction between internal and external movement states:

**inner material**

impulse  
direction  
momentum

**outer material**

eyes  
landscape  
gravity

*the centre is the border between memory and consciousness*

**Water body<sup>146</sup>**

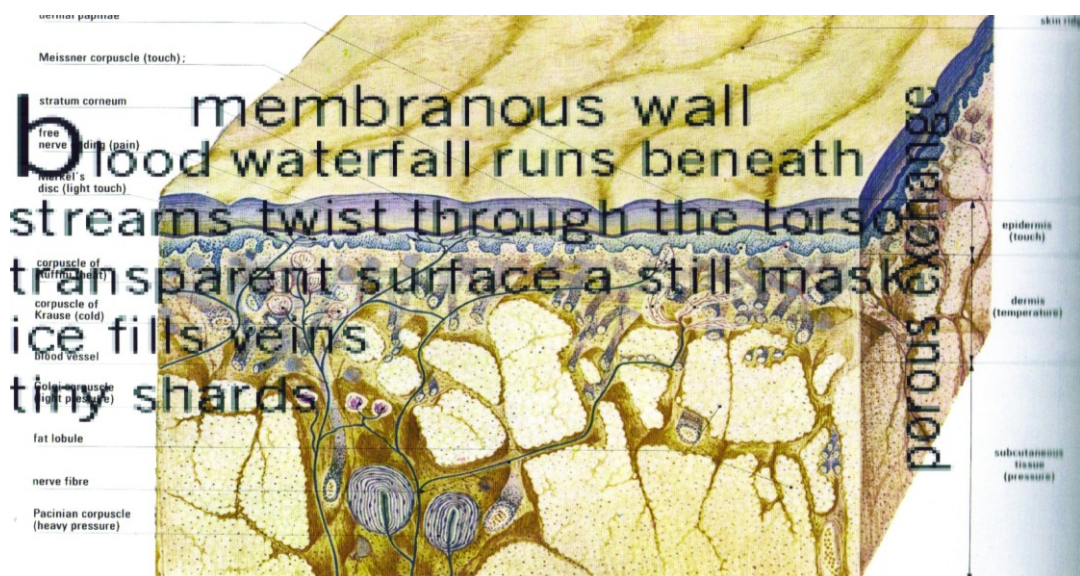
(The following description is adapted from notes taken during the workshop, and collated in the form of a public address as part of a presentation of work at Seki's studio in Berlin, December 2005.)

*We start with one person lying on the floor facing up; the other partner standing at the feet, providing a small shaking which ripples up the spine through to the top of the head, creating a vibration or resonance in the body. The aim here is to challenge the body's relationship to gravity, by using small impulses and applying the image of water. Water gives both an impulse and a quality for movement. The sensation for the person on the floor is that the body is a liquid vessel. If you think how much water is in the blood and the organs, the skin is simply a surface container – the bones can rest heavily on the ground.*

*By sending small currents through the body, the spine can release deeper into the floor, each vertebrae softening and lengthening, the shoulder and pelvis bones widening. In this position it is easy to spot tensions in the body - often around the neck area. Once this area releases, the head is free to follow the current, rocking gently on the skull bone, or occiput. Then the impulse can travel freely up through the body and out the top of the head. This is another way to connect the impulse with the space around. Even though the body is becoming heavier, closer to the ground, the feeling inside is one of lightness, as though the organs of the body are encased and fluid. The eyes and the brain can float lightly inside the skull. The heart and lungs can also be mobile - protected by the skeletal structure of the rib cage. Even when the partner stops shaking, the feeling still resonates through the body, while on the outside the body appears to be still.*

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<sup>146</sup> 'Water Body' echoes dancer Yumiko Yoshioka's concept of 'Hanging Body' and was developed alongside Seki as part of the company, 'Theatre Danse Grotesque' together with Kim Itoh, working in the 1980s in Japan and Germany.



*Water Body - Stream of Consciousness (Minako Seki Butoh workshop, Berlin 2004)*

*Standing to continue this exercise individually, an impulse starts as a small, static weight. A tiny shift causes a current to ripple through the cerebral fluid, resonating out towards the body's periphery. At the same time, a second impulse resounds from somewhere far outside of the body, so that the body is immersed within water as well as containing fluid - the skin acts as a porous barrier between these two states.*

*Now that the body has achieved the sensation of water inside, we can begin to develop different impulses, applying directly the imagination to create new movements. In this 'hanging position', we work from a small impulse in the centre of the body. The upper body can be relaxed, with the weight of the spine and head hanging from the hips. The legs are slightly bent as support underneath. It is important to remember a sense of space in the joints so that the currents can move thought the body. At first the impulse is very simple, moving only from left to right. Even a tiny shift in direction can create a whole sensation of water in the body.*

*This hanging position also means that the impulse to move does not come from the head- we are not thinking which direction to move, but rather sensing it. All the impulses must come from the center point- the tandin. If we imagine the centre or tandin as a small bowl of still water, the impulse acts like dropping a stone into the middle and creating a ripple effect which spreads to the rest of the body. In this position we can also think of the hips as three dimensional, the impulse can travel north, south, east or west, starting from the tandin, travelling through the hips. This also creates a sense of space in the joints. Impulses can also come from underneath the feet, like a wave coming up through the floor.*

*After some time, this becomes quite hard work for the legs. As well as imagining water inside of the body, the air around the body can also be water. Instead of simply hanging in space, we can imagine that we are floating, supported by water underneath the feet, between the legs, under the arms. As the momentum starts to build, different impulses can come from different directions and meet in the centre. There is never a stopping point to each movement, another impulse is always coming from somewhere and going to somewhere. In this way we can work from minimal impulse to maximum effect.*

*These constant currents begin to develop a cyclical, figure of 8 movement. This fig 8 is the source for many movements- it never stops but is constantly regenerating. From this form, we can begin to abstract the movement, playing with rhythm, changing the direction of the currents, speeding up or slowing down motion. At the top of this fig 8 there is a moment of suspension which is not simply hanging in space, or floating in slow motion, but contains possibilities for movement. At this point the body is both compressed and expanding at the same time. At this moment a question starts to form- this question is the starting point for butoh.*

The idea of liquid immersivity reflects here Body-Mind Centering practitioner Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's statement regarding the fluid state of the internal anatomy: 'All the fluids are essentially one fluid – largely made up of water – that change properties and characteristics as it passes through different membranes, flows through different channels and interacts with different substances.'<sup>147</sup> Unlike the mirroring process surrounding the exact physiological acquisition of certain animalistic states described earlier in relation to Mime training, both image and form can be said to be in constant dialogue within a transformational process in butoh. In such a way, physical consciousness occurs in the above exercise, where the butoh performer can be said to be *in dynamic operation* with imagery. Subsequently, when the butoh performer *does* communicate human states, it is as a result of the aesthetic consciousness created, or what Zarrilli terms the 'aesthetic-bodymind'<sup>148</sup>, rather than his/her engagement with descriptive images.

The following chapter expands Zarrilli's concept of dual consciousness in relation to butoh performer Ko Murobushi's solo work, 'Edge'. In particular, I will illustrate how the relationship of physical and aesthetic consciousness in Ko's performance creates a double exposure between those imagistic source materials employed here and their physical articulation through external choreographic presentation, thus further troubling relations between writing and movement processes. In addition, Hamera's spectator-led ethnographic debate on Butoh dancer Oguri and his company Renzoku provides a useful interface on which to further debate theories surrounding spectatorship in dance, through interrogating notions of virtuosity and visibility in butoh.

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<sup>147</sup> Cohen, B.B., *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: the experiential anatomy of Body-Mind Centering* Contact Editions (MA: Northampton, 1993).

<sup>148</sup> For fuller guidance, see Zarrilli 2004: 654-655

### Introduction

At the still point of the turning world neither flesh nor fleshless:  
Neither from or towards  
At the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement.<sup>149</sup>

This chapter seeks to locate butoh within a spectator discourse, focusing on Ko Murobushi's solo performance work 'Edge'. In particular, Murobushi's work is analysed here through the application of the following critical elements as applied to a wider reading of butoh:

- Lepecki's proposition for slowness and stillness by way of toppling choreography's ontology<sup>150</sup>
- engendering fictions and the holographic body in butoh
- Massumi's 'visceral gaze'<sup>151</sup> in dance spectatorship
- Hamera's citation of virtuosity and the 'laboring monster'<sup>152</sup>
- temporal processes and butoh's relation to Performance Art
- the politics of pain in performance

In applying the above elements to a spectator reading of Ko's work, I seek in part, to advocate dance ethnographer Judith Hamera's proposition for the dance writer or critic:

That is: to abandon the singular hero-story of virtuosity entirely in favour of a bracing love story between artist and critic in which each remakes the other, in favour of a story of "proprioceptive" and projective affiliation<sup>153</sup>, made and remade as each gazes forward, and vicariously, inhabits the other.<sup>154</sup>

In following Hamera's proposition, and developing from those initial arguments outlined in Chapter One, I seek to question established conventional relations held between dance and writing – or between dance performer and critic, where the ability to analyse Ko's performance is made further complicated by the presence of technology –

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<sup>149</sup> Elliot, T.S. 'Burnt Norton' in *Four Quartets* London, Faber Press, 2001

<sup>150</sup> Lepecki, A., 'Still: On the Vibratile Microscopy of Dance' in *Re-membering the Body* ed. Brandstetter, G and Volckers (Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2000), 334-364

<sup>151</sup> Massumi 2002:144-161

<sup>152</sup> Hamera J. 2000: 151

<sup>153</sup> Foster 1995: 3-24

<sup>154</sup> Hamera 2000:151

viewed here through a recorded video rather than live performance. While I have witnessed Murobushi's performance of 'Edge' both live and recorded, of particular interest to the current debate are those certain teleological interventions and associations rendered through viewing the work on video, therefore the recorded document will be referenced throughout this chapter. I adopt the term 'proprioceptive gaze' as a means to deploy an invested perspective of dance based on the dancer's own agency, as contiguous with certain self delineated or self inscribing solo dance practices outlined in Chapter One. Equally, an affiliative gaze is aimed for as that which seeks to probe the interstices between aesthetic and physical consciousness in the hopes of producing an embedded critique of Murobushi's work, which should serve to further illustrate some of my own solo performance work in Chapter Four.

Ko is a second generation Butoh dancer, who worked and performed with Butoh's founder Tatsumi Hijikata, and later formed one of the main dancers of Dairakudakan, one of Japan's leading Butoh companies in the late 1980s, together with Akaji Maro. In addition he shares a long term collaboration with butoh dancer Carlotta Ikeda, choreographing for her French based company, Ariadone. Devised and choreographed by Murobushi, 'Edge' is a solo performance work, approximately 45 min in length, which was developed in 2000 and since has toured internationally. I first saw this performance live at The Place Theatre, London in 2003. Since then I acquired the DVD recording of the same work, though this version was filmed in Japan at the Asbestos Kan studio (originally belonging to Hijikata) in 2005. As stated in the introduction, my analysis of 'Edge' is based on the film version and proposes an inquiry into the ensuing effects of film technologies, dance performance and butoh by way of attempting to locate a self reflexive spectator positioning of Ko's work, with the aim of producing a metacritique of the role of spectatorship in dance. Chapter One debates the relationship of dance and writing, considering some of the contributing factors that have decreed this art form's reliance on scriptural processes in what I argue is an oversubscription to certain spectator accounts by way of ensuring dance's permanence, where the majority of evaluative accounts of western theatrical dance performance frequently recourse to the spectator or, in many cases, the critic. Such spectator accounts must contend with those individual perceptions held by the writer, with recourse to theories housed in cultural, critical and social debates surrounding the body.

The majority of questions surrounding agency within spectatorship have been the subject of debate since the late 1970s within western media and performance related disciplines, raised mainly from a feminist perspective and will be further examined below. While issues of representation surrounding the body in western contemporary culture are subject to a range of discursive practices, it is worth mentioning the considerable critical debate covered in the field of contemporary film studies concerning the relationship of representation and the notion of idealised spectatorship. To this end, cultural critic and film theorist Laura Mulvey provides the respective means here of positioning the body in cinema through a critical self reflexive gaze. In particular, Mulvey's essay, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'<sup>155</sup> is a key text in performance studies. Her feminist account of the gendered gaze in film spectatorship was pivotal in shifting the responsibility of the spectator toward a reflexive and subjective understanding, in particular, exposing certain Freudian concepts inherent to much of the dominant structures governing the male gaze and, in doing so, challenging many of the established ideals surrounding the female body in film. Such a critique is enlarged upon within contemporary performance theory by feminist writers and cultural theorists, Diane Taylor and Rebecca Schneider, both of whom have interrogated shifting perceptions of the body in performance as influenced by other more popular media forms such as news coverage and television. Finally, by way of locating butoh within a cultural debate, I draw on Hamera's<sup>156</sup> critique of another Japanese butoh artist, Oguri, and his company Renzoku, citing her critique on the role of virtuosity in butoh performance as a means to further locate the notion of the idealised western spectator in relation to an eastern dance form.

The introduction of butoh in Europe and the US in the late 1970s (almost a decade after its emergence in Japan) was paved by often hypersensitive ethnographic accounts. As a contemporary movement expression, butoh's initial exposure in the west was predominantly marked by stark and grotesque photographic images which purportedly succeeded in affirming the body's political status through a post-apocalyptic iconic overlay, thus ensuring a particular socio-political register within any western spectator positioning of a Japanese dance body. While such archival procedures ensured the preservation of a vital cultural and political legacy, the predominant representation of

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<sup>155</sup> Mulvey, L., 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Performance Analysis, an introductory coursebook*, ed Colin Counsell and Laurie Wolf (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>156</sup> Hamera 2000 : 144-53



butoh in the west through prescribed spectator accounts can be argued to have positioned the Japanese butoh dancer within a rigid cultural agenda that would appear in direct opposition to a contemporary movement expression which proposes the fundamental transgression of any singular cultural placement of the body through constantly interrogating its own methods and ideologies through the principles of transformation. Thus, while 'Edge' remains the focus of the debate throughout, in addition to focusing my argument within an analysis of the work itself, I am using 'Edge' as a template on which to contest a range of disparate and often conflicting views surrounding the body in contemporary performance.

### **THE VISCERAL GAZE: a proprioceptive viewing position**

Initial definitions of the relation of writing to dance might include the following: reflective, responsive, retrospective. Yet all of these terms imply an automatic distancing from the event itself. In the case of viewing and writing about the event, however, I am interested in pursuing the notion of the affiliated or proprioceptive gaze as that which might deploy other spectator accounts by means of description; as that which is motivated by a secondary movement of the eye, to do with individual reception. I propose how the visceral gaze allows for a more proprioceptive viewing stance which is self reflective as well as analytical, in an attempt to direct a spectator analysis of Ko's performance towards a new proposition for dance writing. Further sections will consider how various critical elements found within butoh, aligned here with Lepecki's challenge to choreography's ontological status – namely, stillness, slow motion, or what he terms 'paronomasia' - might serve as separate entities on which to question an ethics of alterity in butoh performance.

One prevalent concern (is) [...] the question of a dance that initiates a critique of representation by insisting on the still, on the slow, and on that particular form of repetition known in rhetoric as "paronomasia" – is the interrogation of choreography's political ontology.<sup>157</sup>

If, as I suggest as the start of Chapter One the dance body might be considered under the terms image, memory and history, the question arises, then, in acknowledging such critical distance as implying also a space within which cultural representation might

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<sup>157</sup> Lepecki, A. 'Choreography's "slower ontology": Jerome Bel's critique of representation' in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 45. Here, Lepecki equate paronomasia with the Greek composite words of 'para', meaning both alongside and beyond, and 'onomos' meaning name. (Lepecki *ibid*:62)

occur in the case of a female western spectator watching a Japanese male performer, what bodies might further be defined through a reciprocal, or proprioceptive spectator positioning of Ko's performance by way of locating a multiple of meanings and identities through reflexive critical inquiry? Nigel Stewart suggests how we absorb the dance image kinaesthetically - not detached through vision but invested and reflected. That is what makes the moments of reception so difficult to discern beyond their own immediacy and hence causality, as Stewart further suggests of subjective spectatorship regarding Hijikata's work:

We cannot consider then the dancer's body as if it is stuck in a static temporality, an externally related series of discrete moments (like photographic images) or of psychic states of actions. On the contrary we will want to consider the dance image in terms of the *dynamic temporality of the moving body*.<sup>158</sup>

Chapter One considered some of those mnemonic traces that occur in the gaps and overlaps relayed between the present dancer and his/her re-presentation on paper, following the notion of disappearance. Elsewhere Lepecki provides an initial attempt to describe the body since modernism as inseparable from its image:

How does one describe a body? Firstly, the body inherited from the passage into modernity has a proprietary relationship to 'its' subject (the body always "belongs" to a self); secondly, modernity always allows the subject to experience its body's surface as a screen rendering the subject to the world as an *image*; and thirdly, the body's surface as an image is experienced as a detachable organ, permanently floating between subjectivity, alterity, and the experience of the corporeal.<sup>159</sup>

If we apply this argument to those aesthetic forces at work in the presentation of 'Edge', the interplay between these states presents its motion clearly where the butoh performer undergoes a process of transformation, engaged with continuous emerging - and emergent - shapes through a constant disappearance and reappearance of the human form into other living matter. The DVD production of Murobushi's performance work 'Edge' that will be referred to throughout this chapter was filmed by video artist, Osamu Goto; the set employs minimal lighting design, with the sparse addition of sound (Morton Feldman's composition 'Piece for Four Piano's') occurring in the final moments. The camera-person remains stationary throughout, thus his (and our) view is often obscured by the back of the audiences' heads. The camera apparatus is slow to

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<sup>158</sup> Stewart, N., 'Re-Languaging the body: Phenomenological description and the dance body' in *Performance Research* Vol.3 No.2, 1998, p. 45

<sup>159</sup> Lepecki 2000: 336

adjust to lighting changes while the colour quality remains poor throughout. The studio is a small black box setting and Ko is dressed for the almost the duration of the performance in black trousers and white shirt, removing these in the final scene to reveal his entire body coated in white makeup, with the result that most of the footage appears to be shot in monochrome. 'Edge' presents a double exposure where Ko's movements appear to be created within an interior dialogue based on his physical articulation of a series of images and associative languages. These languages slip between internalised conscious states, verbal dialogue expressed mainly through self-address, and articulated physical forms – the latter appearing pre-disposed towards anti-kinetic flow, articulated through grunts, and arrived at instantaneously. The resulting interplay of these three states effectively de-territorialises any standard vocabularies by which to interpret his movements. Ko's ability in movement to slip between animal, mineral and human forms within the phantasmagoric act of transformation, provides a constant re-framing of the body's image surfaces, shifting any negotiation of identity on the part of the viewer towards equally fluid or transformative states. If I declare motion as both the act that is produced by the performer and also those subsequent acts of registering motion through the (movable) eye of the spectator, the work of description, then, must also mediate between such movement. Such a transformation, based on a politics of alterity, can be argued to enable a double visioning on the part of the spectator; part reflected, part projected, as theatre critic and cultural theorist David Williams suggests, in watching Contact Improvisation:

In the face-to-face encounter, the other's alterity demands that I accept responsibility (response-ability), that I respond.<sup>160</sup>

Even in the 'passive' act of viewing Ko's performance through its screen presentation, I am constantly recalibrating my responses to the unfolding scene - Ko's labouring body creates a dissection of this viewing post, through a kind of self autopsy, whereby my viewing is *enacted upon*.

In the case of viewing Ko's work by DVD, it is precisely those accidental technological illusions cited above that intervene directly in the act of viewing and re-viewing his performance on screen by creating a series of fictional bodies that can be regarded as what performance theorist Johannes Birringer (1998) terms 'technological abstractions'

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<sup>160</sup> Williams, D. 'Working (in) the In-between: Contact Improvisation as an Ethical Practice' in *Writings on Dance The French Issue* 15: 1996.

- what I will later term 'holographic bodies' – and which, I suggest, further serve to unsettle relations between dancer and writer here.

As a political site, the body thus already performs a potentially dysfunctional role vis-à-vis technological abstraction and recuperation/dispersion.<sup>161</sup>

In her ethnographically led debate of butoh artist, Oguri, and his company Renzoku, Hamera points to the role of individual agency in the act of viewing as that which 'remains glued to the expectations, delusions and agendas deployed by artists and spectators'. As such, she considers the difficulties of shifting register from stage to page, suggesting the emergence of bodily 'plots' in such a transfer:

I lost Oguri discursively, in the transposition of "the moved" to "the written" because the standard vocabularies used to capture his difference are no longer trustworthy. These standard but untrustworthy vocabularies "provide us with a way of identifying the typical 'plots' which histories of bodies are destined to inhabit".<sup>162</sup>

Dance writer Hayden White's categorization of bodily 'plots' is useful here, in denoting destined places to inhabit, processes of mapping or "emplotting" and, also, 'in the sense of conspiracy [...] involved in imputing a single "history" to congeries of things called by the same name, such as bodies, which may bear only the most contingent relationship to one another.'<sup>163</sup> Hamera's suggestion of the potential complicity of bestowing certain 'plots' upon the act of description might be considered here in response to dance's predisposition towards disappearance where Noverre's declares dance to be 'an art in self erasure'<sup>164</sup>. Indeed, the term 'plots' would seem to indicate a certain categorization of the dance body in performance by complying with those 'standard vocabularies' that can be said to contribute directly to a western idealised position of the dance body. In the case of exceptional performing bodies – for example that of the virtuoso ballet dancer - Hamera further asserts that standard vocabularies surrounding such expectations might include 'heroism, mastery and talent'<sup>165</sup>, suggesting a complicit acknowledgment of the virtuosic in dance performance that

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<sup>161</sup> Birringer, J., 'Impossible Anatomies' in *Media and Performance: Along the Border* (JHU Press, 1998), 128

<sup>162</sup> Hamera 2000: 144

<sup>163</sup> Hayden, W. 'Bodies and their Plots' in *Choreographing History* ed. Foster, S. (Indiana University Press, 1995), 230-234.

<sup>164</sup> Noverre, Jean-Georges 'Letters on Dancing and Ballet' in *What is Dancing?* ed. Copeland R. & Cohen M. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983.

<sup>165</sup> Hamera 2000: 150

binds our expectations of the supreme, hyper disciplined and ideologically bound dance body, allowing the body to exist at a safe distance, as *spectacle*:

Consider how different this image of dancer as laboring monster is from the conventional hero-story of virtuosity in dance. Oguri is not the idealized body of ballet, where the conspiracy of dancer and spectator produces and reads a story of a technique so hard it looks easy, a hero-story pure and simple. Rather, Oguri's virtuosity offers a spectacle of a technique that is hard and looks it [...].<sup>166</sup>

Similar to Hamera's description of Oguri's manifest physical effort in his performance, which 'troubles the performative boundaries that separate labouring novice and transcendent virtuosic hero'<sup>167</sup>, it is precisely those laboured mechanics of movement which reoccur throughout Ko's solo performance which belie any acknowledged invisible workings on the part of dance, thus compelling new frameworks through which an audience might encounter the virtuous.

*Ko's body appears monstrous.....joints appear broken, limbs hang and are moved by apparent forces surrounding the body. Like those slow, undulating rhythms rippling in the liminal spaces of this intimate scene, in acknowledging the acts of the labouring monster, our gaze is trapped in an accidental occidental play of light.... on the camouflage of white on brown skin that marks its mask-play of hide and seek in the shadows on/ off stage, sometime ash caked grimace – noh devil – laughing buddha – cheshire cat – deathmask....Ko's body occupies space through these constant shifting states of replication and recovery.*<sup>168</sup>

Ko sweats, moans and grunts his way throughout his forty-minute performance, making no effort to disguise the labour involved – his movements could be described as awkward, gravity based, anti-kinetic - when he falls, we hear the thud of his body impacting the ground. Elsewhere Hamera describes virtuosity as an 'organising fiction', that can be seen to comply with a certain set of assumptions to do with the hyper-competent dancing body: '(V)irtuosity – that critical container, curiously hyperdisciplined, hyperlabouring thus hyperinvisible – yet somehow, ineffably, elusively more.'<sup>169</sup> However, in refuting the discernibility of effort, the virtuous in dance might also be argued to, in effect, sanction a certain sanitised spectatorial dissection - as Lepecki states of an overexposed western viewing position: '(the) audience has learned

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid

<sup>167</sup> Ibid

<sup>168</sup> Sections in italics indicate those descriptive accounts written in immediate response to Ko Murobushi's solo performance, 'The Edge'.

<sup>169</sup> Hamera 2000:147

to perpetuate a morbid hygiene of the gaze'<sup>170</sup>. Such organising fictions would appear to provide a means of harness certain expectations to the presence or *presentness* of the virtuoso dance body by ascribing it with '[....] tales of autonomous artistic prowess that, though no longer credible nor persuasive, seem at least more useful than embracing the absence of the performers body'.<sup>171</sup>

(Final scene)

*ko enters in white noise*  
*the sound of stubbed feet, heavy breath, the atmosphere has thickened*  
*his steps slow to stillness*  
*the light no longer casts its metallic sheen but is heavy, dense -*  
*only the mechanics of breath exposing copper undertones of musculatures*  
*the tissues spun in taut threads across his back*  
*skeletal pressure evades a thin skin mask*

Forty minutes have passed; Ko's white stage makeup starting to wear off, his physical efforts inscribed in white markings across the black floor. Beneath the surface lies the sculptural, the iconic, an alchemy of flesh, sweat and grease, whose edges now smear the stage: if we were here now, we could witness the room's temperature change; its smell also. The above accumulative effects on Ko's body endured over time might be argued to discredit Hamera's 'plots', and in doing so, effectively challenge any (western) spectator positioning of his (eastern) body, where physical exertion undergone results in the gradual application of slow motion and repetition, causing me (the viewer) to switch register, considerably, from watching Ko's body as a moving, dancing being to watching its topographic surfaces. The project of watching now becomes cartographic – a mesh of muscles and nerve endings displayed on the skin represents a virtual three dimensional anatomy map.<sup>172</sup> Lepecki's term "paronomasia" can be further applied here to the use of stillness and slow motion which transpires within Ko's celluloid presentation and which would appear to 'denaturalise the body' in disavowing any syntactic visual response, instilling rather a kind of haptic gaze that reflects more the sensory perceptions of the spectator while 'engaging the intellect in the interpretation of

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<sup>170</sup> Lepecki, A., 'Inscribing Dance' in *Of the Presence of the Body* (ed) Lepecki, A. Wesleyan University Press, Connecticut, 2004.

<sup>171</sup> Hamera 2000:147

<sup>172</sup> It is worth noting here that since originally writing on the work in question, Murobushi has revisited the visual concept of sculptural dance in his most recent work 'QuickSilver', performed recently at the 'CanAsian International Dance Festival' in Toronto, May 2009. Here he deliberately uses silver stage makeup to emphasise a topographic presentation of the body's musculature structure. For further reference see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXaLRu8wUhg&feature=related>

the kinaesthetic experience.<sup>173</sup> Lepecki historic assertion of 'dancing stillness' as that which discredits Ballet's project of motion, further supports my suggestion that the inclusion of slowness and stillness pose a direct challenge to conventional rhythmic assumptions in western theatrical dance where:

[....] stillness operated semiologically and physiologically as "pauses", thus clearly falling outside of the motions and gestures considered as dance proper – moreover those poses as pauses were nothing but an all-too-human imperfection, a compromise of form before the ideal of dance as flight.<sup>174</sup>

The following section will consider the notion of the holographic body in Ko's performance as that which engenders a range of theories surrounding the production of the body as icon within contemporary film studies. In attempting a metacritique on the role of spectatorship in dance in relation to contemporary film theory, I propose that, just as the majority of dance writing must contend with a body automatically distanced from its present/ce in performance, preserved in the form of video documentation and/or written accounts of practice, the film document must also acknowledge its autonomy from the singular performance event it has captured. I further suggest how it is precisely this threshold between physical, mechanical, technological and teleological processes surrounding the creation of Ko's dance work that enables a wider understanding of the event in relation to temporal structures. As such, it is the (invisible) presence of film technology in 'Edge', coupled with Ko's manipulation of time deployed within the rhythmic structuring of his movements (alternating between speeds and stillness), that can be said to endow the spectator with an array of organising fictions that might further engender a series of holographic bodies, thus enabling new framings.

### **Dance and the Mediated Image**

The work of the camera in 'Edge' serves to further disrupt the notion of virtuosity within Ko's performance, echoing Hamera's description of Oguri in 'produc(ing) a body fragmented, "categorized by virtue of a kind of analytic [and spectator] dissection," where each limb or gesture or expression is cut into successive sites of labor and never

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<sup>173</sup> Burnside, F., 'Home thoughts from abroad: distinctive preoccupations of British contemporary dance' in *Dance Theatre Journal* Vol.9 (3) Spring, 1992.

<sup>174</sup> Lepecki 2000: 340

completely reassembled as, or sutured into the smooth surface of mastery.<sup>175</sup> Deleuze, in his writings on the cinematic lens, proposes a similar relationship between the subjective and the objective in cinema where he purports the role of the camera as equally needing to mediate between imaginary and prescribed states within any given spectator analysis:

[...] this is not the simple distinction between the subjective and the objective, the real and the imaginary – it is, on the contrary, their indiscernability which will endow the camera with a rich array of functions and initiate a new conception of the frame and reframings.<sup>176</sup>

Attributing individual agency on the part of the camera person is, perhaps, a flawed motive without prior knowledge of those expert performance making decisions and compositional strategies employed by either the solo performer, or his film maker. Further on, I will suggest that where the mediated performance document evolves beyond either a manual transcription of dance or, indeed, a critical account of practice - it actively intervenes in the live event, functioning as a mediator between the live and the 'read' dance event.

For the purposes of the present argument, it is worth noting here butoh's specific relationship to visual media – in particular Tatsumi Hijikata's deliberate construction of cinematic techniques within his dances – in order to foreground a further spectator led debate on Murobushi's solo performance. As I suggested earlier, butoh's initial relationship with the camera can be clearly traced back to those considerable photographic archive materials whose influences can be argued to have significantly contributed to a western ethnographic understanding of this dance expression. While Hijikata's legacy is preserved for the most part through his final photographic collaboration with Eiko Hosoe, he did, in fact, collaborate with several film makers during the eighties, most notably with Japanese experimental film maker Takahiko Imura, who was particularly interested in exploring the often conflicting tensions between the gestural act of performance and the film image.<sup>177</sup> It is important here to distinguish between the role of camera in documenting Hijikata's performance works and the integration of film within his collaborative butoh projects. Unlike Hijikata's

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<sup>175</sup> Hamera 2000:150

<sup>176</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

<sup>177</sup> Barber, S., 'Hijikata and the Film Image' in *Hijikata: Revolt of the Body* (UK and US: Creation Books, 2006).



other celluloid contemporaries Eiko Hosoe (*Navel and A-Bomb*, 1960), and Donald Richie (*Sacrifice*, 1960; *War Games*, 1962) who used extensive editing techniques in the post production of Hijikata's video works, Iimura 'was concerned to fragment and disrupt the illusion of documentation [...] to probe the volatile zones of space and time between the film image and the human body.'<sup>178</sup> Iimura reportedly described his film collaborations with Hijikata as 'cine-dances', often using roaming camera techniques which enabled him to move fluidly, changing proximity to the dancers, and registering the audience's live reactions to the performance, all of which resulted in roughly assembled footage, presenting the camera's status as what Barber terms 'an autonomous visual counterpart to Hijikata's work.'<sup>179</sup> Such a collision served to both expose the raw mechanics of Hijikata's movement, while endowing the camera with a new set of frames within which to view Hijikata's dance, thus challenging the conventional roles of the performer as subject and the camera-person as documenter. The notion of an embodied eye of the camera is taken up in the following chapter, explored within a series of self capture choreographic works for camera. Before developing a further inquiry into those 'accidental illusions' which can be said to frame a reading of Ko's filmed performance work, it is useful to turn to those wider influences found in relation to dominant visual media discourses surrounding contemporary performance, and the influence of such certain media developments which can be argued to have endorsed the notion of the 'passive viewer'.

In a recent symposium, performance studies theorist Rebecca Schneider contested some of the 'mythical constructs' surrounding current cultural media documentation processes. Here, she proposed the idea of the photograph as a live medium, whereas the medium of film, she suggested, may be considered to function as a static (and therefore 'dead') object<sup>180</sup>. Schneider further argued that the role of film as a live medium can be said to have lost its immediate causality through the continuing effects of its overexposure within news coverage. The resulting passive reception to this most dominant visual discourse, as in the case of media reportage outlined below, can be seen to legislate such a claim. Similarly, within the popular medium of photojournalism, the photographic document can be contested as a mediated and therefore manipulated document which, she argued, is lent agency only through its re-enactment via the gaze,

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid:54

<sup>179</sup> Ibid:55

<sup>180</sup> Taken from a symposium address by Schneider at the *PS/12* Performing Rights Symposium, London, June 2006.

yet rendered problematic on the same basis. Such an inversion of the roles between the live recorded image and the static visual one can be said to challenge certain long standing theories of the gaze as a penetrative intervention, a hypothesis which underlines much feminist critique of dominant spectator theories within Film Studies in the 1970s and will be discussed further below. Schneider's argument has interesting repercussions within a contemporary critique of filmed dance as a 'live image', and is echoed in Philip Auslander's debate on the status of the 'live' event within contemporary arts culture;

Live performance thus has become the means by which mediatized representations are naturalized, according to a simple logic that appeals to our nostalgia for what we assumed was the im-mediate: if the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, it must have been "real" to begin with.<sup>181</sup>

What if, however, the documented account of the live event becomes mediatised to the point of losing its immediate impact – becomes fictionalised by those actual documentation processes that serve to testify to the event, the intervention of which serves to preserve its liveness for posterity? Both Schneider (2006) and Taylor (2003) point to the event of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and its subsequent media coverage as marking a pivotal shift in our perception of the live mediated image in film. As Taylor writes of her eye witness account of the event:

Each click of my camera was my own pause/hold as I entered into the suspended rhythm of the present. The archival impulse prompted me to save the images to understand them at some future time. [...] Like the TV's *NOW*, mine was already a repeat, a retrospective as I projected myself into the future, looking back. Photography, at this moment, was paradoxically action and anti-action, performance and antiperformance, a doing, a click, in the face of the impossibility of doing, about the need to stop everything until I could get a hold of it.<sup>182</sup>

In his 'Object of Post Criticism' Gregory Ulmer suggests that while photography is essentially a 'mechanical reproduction', it reflects the object without the interference of 'creativity', or interpretative methods on the part of the camera-person. Photography, he suggests, selects and transfers a fragment of the visual continuum onto a new frame. In doing so, it operates both as signifier and also 'signifies itself and something else – it

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<sup>181</sup> Auslander, P., *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>182</sup> Taylor, D. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003:141

becomes a signifier re-motivated within the system of a new frame.<sup>183</sup> Taylor's description of the attacks on the World Trade Centre however, highlights how the mediated over-exposure of such an event through her camera contributes, ultimately, to its being played 'to death'. Her (and our) viewing is sanctioned here by the instant archiving of the image, while in capturing the event it is forever repeatable, replicated and committed to posterity through the collective memory. Schneider further enlarges on Taylor's critique where she suggests that photography has played a similar role in establishing certain iconic images of the body now associated with acts of recent terrorism. She suggests that the 'staged' series of photographs showing Iraqi prisoners at Guantanamo Bay forced to pose for the camera in humiliating acts can be said to substantiate the viewer's position whereby the retrospective act of viewing might also engender a particular emotional response on the part of the viewer, thus, she argues, the static image becomes activated within the resulting effects of shame initiated in the moment of viewing such a document.<sup>184</sup>

Schneider's critique clearly underscores Taylor's example above in pointing towards the necessity within any contemporary performance critique to consider those elements at play within the construction of mediatised performance. To this end I propose that the retrospective viewing of Ko's performance might engender a series of fictional or holographic bodies as located within the space of cultural representation where dance's representational frame operates its own tensions where presence, disappearance and representation exist.<sup>185</sup> Earlier, I argue for the case for a proprioceptive gaze, whereby spectatorship in dance does not perceive a dance image in the live event as one might perceive a static image, but rather might absorb the moving image through a kinetic response - not passive or detached, but kinetically responsive. Stewart (1998), writing on the specificity of the dance image as 'diasporatic', offers a further distinction of dance in relation to some of those above mediatised forms discussed above:

If dance phenomenology is primordially concerned with the form of the body-in-motion then this is, *ipso facto*, a form-in-time, a form-in-the-making. [...] (T)herefore we need to consider the dance image in terms of the dynamic temporality of the moving body. [...] (W)e can proactively derive kinaesthetic information from static visual objects (such as the photograph), but until that information is itself integrated

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<sup>183</sup> Ulmer, G., 'Object of Post Criticism' in *The Anti Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (ed) Foster, H. (New York: The New Press, 1998).

<sup>184</sup> Schneider: 2006

<sup>185</sup> Lepecki: 2004

as the felt trajectory of a moving force we will not grasp the dance  
image.<sup>186</sup>

Where the role of the gaze in performance has been developed mainly within psychoanalytic and feminist discourse, Mulvey's definition of a third spectator position – that of 'possessive spectatorship'<sup>187</sup> – is of particular interest here; a term which I later suggest might enable a more useful critique in locating my own western spectator position in regard to Ko's eastern body. Mulvey's critique of the *gendered gaze* of spectatorship forming as the result of an 'overexposure' of the female body image in film (Mulvey: 1975) locates the female body in performance as that which has been saturated by an entire databank of screen imagery during the twentieth century, which in turn has generated its own economy of meaning that, she argues, continues to influence and inform perceptions of the work of female performers today. In her book 'The Explicit Body in Performance', Schneider refers to this overexposure of the female form as a distinct feature in the work of many female contemporary performance artists.<sup>188</sup> Indeed, as virtual technology artist Rosi Braidotti argues, the relationship that any female performer today might entertain with her historic counterpart is in itself a project.<sup>189</sup> The possessive spectator, Mulvey suggests, 'commits an act of violence against the cohesion of the story, the aesthetic integrity that holds it together, and the vision of its creator.'<sup>190</sup> In doing so, I suggest here that the possessive spectator might also enable a new framing of the body in performance, in particular by way of attempting an alternate spectator positioning of butoh in Ko's performance. I wonder whether the equivalent to Mulvey's possessive spectator might in fact be activated within a retrospective viewing of Ko's 'Edge' through the medium of film where:

(t)he delayed cinema reveals the significance of the pose even when the something has passed [...]. (P)ose allows time for the cinema to denaturalize the human body.'<sup>191</sup>

I am particularly interested in locating an equivalent of the 'delayed' cinematic effect within a reading of Ko's performance which occurs in the shift of register between the

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<sup>186</sup> Stewart 1998: 45

<sup>187</sup> The term 'possessive spectatorship' is applied, notionally, in the following chapter, as a way to interrogate the frame of the camera as part of a self-capture series of solo dance works shot outdoors in Dartmoor.

<sup>188</sup> Schneider, R. *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>189</sup> Rosi Braidotti cited from ICA video 'Seduced and Abandoned - the female body in cyberspace' - *Virtual realities and the arts symposium*. ICA, London, 1993.

<sup>190</sup> Mulvey, L., *Death '24x a Second* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

<sup>191</sup> Ibid: 163

live act of performance and the mediated performance through film. What would happen if I chose to play the video of 'Edge' in reverse, or half-speed? Would the iconoclastic image of an alleged holocaust body be more readily identified? Lepecki proposes how dance performance – in particular post anthropological discoveries – might offer an alternative logic of encountering, based on a radical giving and proposing a different configuration of time.<sup>192</sup> I argue that the choreographic application of both of slowness and stillness in 'Edge' create a similar effect to those of Mulvey's cinematic 'pose' and close-ups in allowing for a shift in perspective to occur away from any prescribed bodily plot towards a critique of the abject or form-less body. The holographic body that appears in Ko's performance between the shift from 3D to 2D exposes a bodily schema that is no longer denoted through his dance's rhythms. The ensuing response on the part of his audience is visceral - immediate rather than mediated - affective, pliant. The result of our over-exposure of such a delay is disarmingly synaesthetic where the proprioceptive gaze must encounter also its own topography of the eye.<sup>193</sup>

*The space is soiled with the debris of labour – exhaustion – accumulated presences  
just as Ko inverts his body to the grotesque our gaze is inverted, twisted,  
the alien animal hybrid is created once again through fictional bodies -  
A holograph residing within our acquisitioned gaze.*

Viewing Ko's body through the lens of the camera creates a consortium of mediated effects, inferring a tautological engagement between shadow and light, between animate and inanimate, between animal and alien, where the holographic body is reflected in our visual responses, summoned as it were through association, imagination - '[...] evacuat(ing) meanings and identities, to proliferate resemblances without sense or origin.'<sup>194</sup> Mulvey's definition of cinema as creating 'an aesthetic of extreme anthropocentrism'<sup>195</sup> would appear to further inscribe the project of possessive spectatorship within the retrospective viewing of Ko's work via the camera where the ability of the butoh performer to engage in a series of transformations through living matter, organic material, animal and elemental qualities might be argued to engender additional anthropomorphic qualities. Here, Ko's holographic body continuously

<sup>192</sup> Lepecki, A., 'Choreography's "Slower Ontology"' in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>193</sup> Massumi 2002:144-161

<sup>194</sup> Shavero, S., *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>195</sup> Mulvey 2006: 164

appears and disappears, explicating any notion of the alien body as that which remains outside of conventional definitions of dance, evading any mnemonic attempts here to confine 'Edge' to an ethnographically biased western vantage point, eclipsing alien and animal alike through its filmic presentation:

Film performance is transformed by repetitions and actions begin to resemble mechanical compulsive gestures. The cinema's mechanisms take possession of the actor or star and, as their precise and repeated gestures become those of automata, the cinema's uncanny fusion between the living and dead merges with the uncanny confusion between the organic and the inorganic, the human body and the machine.<sup>196</sup>

### **On Monstrous: *Pain as Aesthetic***

Monsters, Hamera suggests, are intimately related to both performance and spectatorship. Her description of butoh dancer Oguri as 'labouring monster' addresses the extraordinary spectacle of discipline within virtuoso performance as that which bears testimony to its own excessive achievement.

Standing against the normal body as its opposite, is the monstrous body which is nothing other than a mediation between the non-repressive and the non-sublimative bodies. The monstrous body would be a product of process in which the subject had become its own object and whatever effect it had originally endowed the subject with had been transformed into its opposite.<sup>197</sup>

One of the most common analogies in the west to do with butoh is its relationship to pain and suffering as housed in the apocalyptic body of post-holocaust Japan.<sup>198</sup> However, as I mention at the start of this chapter, such analysis can be attributed to an idealised spectator position, informed by a socio-political understanding of the Japanese cultural body which confines butoh's legacy to post apocalyptic condition rather than toward a contemporary cultural critique of the body in performance. However, attributing the notion of 'suffering' here effectively creates a sense of complicity on the part of the viewer which invites complicity on the part of the audience in the advent of physical hardship within the choreographic structure of 'Edge'.

*Through Ko's stilled and slowed movements a project of synaesthesia is underway,  
The brutality of language forced to illuminate the senses before thought fragment  
response*

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid:172

<sup>197</sup> White, H. in Foster 1995: 231

<sup>198</sup> Masson Sekine 1998: 8

*can be pieced together. Words are replaced by utterances – impulses vitiated and violated in the event of speech. Only in abject stillness can the full impact of this labouring monster render our senses obsolete.*

Watching Ko's body undergo a self autopsy through an investigation into the basic kinesiology and anatomy (in pursuit of an interior, therefore invisible, tick), an eschatological response might bestow pain as a limitation imposed rather than that by which it is necessary to be present, hyper present – felt.

Hamera's description of the monstrous above echoes a widely held trope concerning the idea of the grotesque body in butoh. Historically, the provocative use of bad taste (the Japanese term 'shuaku no bi' can be defined as the aesthetics of ugliness) can actually be seen to be rooted in Japanese tradition, where Barber suggests how Graphic Art practices such as Yokoo which were often incorporated within early butoh dance works, demonstrated a disregard for both Japanese and European artistic values in subjecting established canonical historic art works to bad taste treatment, often displaying visual art works of the 1930s as grotesque antiquated artefacts - as objects of ridicule rather than admiration. Through subverting established traditions in such a way, their aim was to produce 'an anomalous structure that made radical use of universal terms for the express purpose of destroying the universal language'<sup>199</sup>. Barber further suggests how Hijikata's work sought to contest those conventional values as imposing meaningless distinctions between beauty and ugliness or grotesqueness: 'Hijikata (like Antonin Artaud and Jean Genet) positively allied his work to 'dirt' and abjection, and perceived the arbitrary nature of what, at one moment or another, could be perceived by society as 'dirty' '.<sup>200</sup> In particular, he points to Hijikata's 'deep preoccupation with European sources of corporeal imageries'<sup>201</sup> in his attempts to reconfigure an authentic human expression (termed 'Nigutai' in Japanese) through surrealist reconstruction, echoing concerns prevalent to many Japanese artists and writers of the time.

Where the experience of the corporeal in contemporary arts lies within the domain of Live Arts practice, in switching register from fast to slow and (in, the case of Murobushi's filmed work), through switching proximity (via the camera) from distant to close-up, perceptions of butoh can be seen to ascribe more to performance art bodily

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<sup>199</sup> Masson Sekine 1988:14

<sup>200</sup> Ibid

<sup>201</sup> Ibid

practices than to dance in that butoh regards the body as both material – ‘the experience of the corporeal’<sup>202</sup> - and as performance subject / object. For his solo performance ‘Revolt of the Flesh’, Hijikata fasted for several weeks, attaining a bodily mass of 6.5 stone. Fraleigh points to Hijikata’s belief in the need for his dancers to experience surrender with their own bodies in a visceral form<sup>203</sup>: ‘I attempt to press the limits of myself and my material. From the nature of my work, living beings are my material.’<sup>204</sup> It is worth noting here that Hijikata’s 1968 performance was influenced by German visual artist Hans Bellmer. Based around themes of the female doll form, Bellmer’s portraits regard the body from a psychoanalytical premise, representing what he terms an ‘anatomy of the physical consciousness’<sup>205</sup>. Similar to Mulvey’s arguments regarding the role of cinematic transformations which take place through retrospective viewing<sup>206</sup>, Bellmer considered the body to be structured like language, lending itself similarly to anagrams: ‘permutations of organs and limbs, like mirror images, induce different meanings with infinite combinations’<sup>207</sup>.

The body can be compared to a sentence that invites you to dismantle it, so that, in the course of an endless stream of anagrams, its true contents may take shape.<sup>208</sup>

Through exposing the accumulative effects of physical endurance in his virtuoso dance, Ko enables the spectator to experience the passing of time in his performance. In bestowing a heightened sense of temporal awareness, I suggest that his work here is perhaps closer linked to processes surrounding durational performance in Live Arts practice. Throughout the work, Ko can be seen to experience humour, absurdity and boredom, interspersed with tightly controlled choreographed movement phrases. Bellmer’s comparison of the body to a sentence structure above, echoes those manipulated rhythms of extension and contraction at work in Ko’s performance, where the abstraction of certain gestures or everyday movements in the process of durational performance where time is deliberately stalled and drawn out, so that the gesture becomes isolated in time through constant repetition by the artist. In her performance

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<sup>202</sup> Lepecki 2000:336

<sup>203</sup> Fraleigh 2006:44

<sup>204</sup> Hijikata, T., ‘To Prison’ in *Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh* trans Ruyak, J. and Kurihara N., *The Drama Review* Spring Vol.44 (1) 56-59

<sup>205</sup> Cited in Greiner, C. ‘Researching Dance in the Wild’ in *TDR: The Drama Review* 51:3 (T195) Fall 2007. New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

<sup>206</sup> Mulvey 2006:172

<sup>207</sup> Beaumelle, A. in Semff M. and Spira, A. (eds) *Hans Bellmer Ostfildern-Ruit* : Hatje Cantz, 2004

<sup>208</sup> Bellmer, H., *Petit Anatomie de l’inconscient physique ou l’atomie de l’image* Paris: Allia, 1957:45.



'Relation in Space' (1976) performance artist Marina Abramovich and her partner Yuri continuously run and crash into each other's bodies for many hours, until one or the other can no longer stand. By repeating and speeding up this singular gesture in such a way, the action becomes heightened in significance over time while, simultaneously, the materiality of time can be said to be exposed within the repetition of the action. The relationship that develops here between performer and audience can be seen to challenge the traditional spectator/performer divide where perceptions that form across the distances provided within the conventional re-presentation of performance are erased as Yuri and Abramovich's bodies simultaneously interrogate both their presence / liveness - and also their impermanence / inevitable mortality through the use of repetition and the ensuing effects of physical exertion. In refining and highlighting the physicality of their gestures in such a way, the durational performance mode would appear to return their repeated acts of performance to an expression of pure physical consciousness.

Watching Ko's successive laboured movements we experience time through measured breaths, for in that place there is no space other than between – or 'Ma' in Japanese, meaning an subjective and experiential understanding of time - implying also a passing, a changing from one state to another. Yet breath is measurable, as to withhold or sustain it could lead to death. And breath is the active agent of dynamic exchange within the present tense of live performance, as Zarrilli states: 'It is through breath that the aesthetic inner body reaches and touches both the surface body of exteroception and also the depth "blood" body of our inner recesses.'<sup>209</sup> I suggest here, that Ko's performance might be argued to maintain an objective distance between a sense of autonomous disclosure – contracted here within the immediate conditions of his laboured movements - and the appearance of pain in performance. Like a dog intent on pulling out a thorn with its teeth, Ko presents an abject and compelling body of suffering, where the materiality of the body is revealed as layers are peeled, metaphorically and physically, making spectacularly visual, the relation between dance and labour.

Massumi draws a clear trajectory of the passage of pain in relation to gravity.

A perception is a force-effect. [...] Every vision, every touch, every intermodal experience, passes from an unrefusable (and unbeyable)

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<sup>209</sup> Zarrilli 2004: 664,665

complex limit-tension, through hallucinatory grounding in objectivity, to existential flight, back to the conditions of emergence. [...]. An event, a passage: “force” is a verb. Its action is unbeyable because, across its unrefusable repetition, it commands creation. Its imperative expression is the new.<sup>210</sup>

The ‘new’ here can be equated in performance terms, to Eugenio Barba’s notion of ‘pre-expressivity’<sup>211</sup> where he considered pain as a necessary component in focusing a heightened state of physical awareness in the performer:

Un-ease then, becomes a means of control, a kind of internal radar which permits performers to observe themselves while in action. Not with their eyes but by means of a series of physical perceptions which confirm that extra-daily, non-habitual tensions are at work in the body.<sup>212</sup>

Within Live Art practices, it can be argued, pain goes hand in hand with presence - essentially, to do with ‘an awareness of bodily autonomy’<sup>213</sup>. Performance Artists Ron Athey, Franko B and Marina Abramovich can all be said to hold a common performance objective in exposing the materiality of the body in relation to pain and temporality in some of their works, often accessed through the repetitive actions of cutting, bleeding, as well as various physical endurance tasks<sup>214</sup>. While the singular action of cutting might imply a range of intentions and emotional responses on the part of both the spectator and the performer, the carefully constructed and deliberate repetition of such a performance act can be seen to move such an action beyond individual volition on the part of the performer, while further enabling a set of responses from the (seemingly complicit) spectator. Elizabeth Heard, initially presents a debate on pain in relation to Hijikata’s body in performance:

If the adept body accesses the realm of ideas and abstractions, the body in pain anchors signification in the material world.<sup>215</sup>

Intense pain, Heard argues, obscures not only our relationship to the world, but also our relationship to our own materiality: ‘how therefore, can pain be a coherent part of the

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<sup>210</sup> Massumi 2002:160

<sup>211</sup> See Barba E., and Savarese, N., *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret of the Performer*. Routledge: London and New York, 1991.

<sup>212</sup> Barba and Saravese 1991:110

<sup>213</sup> Bojana Kunst, Slovenian Theatre critic, speaking at *The Anatomical Theatre Revisited*, Conference, Amsterdam, 2006.

<sup>214</sup> See Abramovich, M., ‘The Lips of Thomas’ (1975); Athey, R., ‘Sebastian Suspended’ (2000); Franco B., ‘I Miss You’ 2002.

<sup>215</sup> Heard, E. ‘Space, Signs and Artaud’s Hieroglyphic Body’ in *Performance Research Journal* Vol.11 (1) 2006: 48

performing body?'<sup>216</sup> Yet Ko's body does not appear distracted nor absented by pain – engaged as it is in a state of constant state of emergence. Contrary here to Heard's suggestion of a body absorbed within the imposed conditions of pain, I believe there is a conscious engagement in those physiological sensations at play in 'Edge' that directly contribute to Ko's intense awareness of the conditions of each movement quality where he appears intent on following a kind of multiple and dissipated proprioceptive feedback of infinite images, words and sensations that filter across his body's surface. Here, Zarrilli's claim for the embodiment of pain in performance marks a notable diversion which can be said to create complicity on the part of an audience:

The normative disappearance of both surface and recessive bodies is reversed when we experience pain or dysfunction. In pain, sensory intensification in the body demands direct thematization. Pain is an affective call which has the "quality of compulsion": ie. The pain seizes and constricts our attention.<sup>217</sup>

Kurihara further points to the bind, within Hijikata's work, between words, pain and consciousness:

Instead of liberating the body from language, Hijikata tied up the body with words, turning it into a material object, an object that is like a corpse. Paradoxically, by this method, Hijikata moved beyond words and presented something only a live body can express. That is the essence of Hijikata's butoh. Hijikata saw human existence as inextricably part of the body. But this body only comes alive when it is chased into a corner by words and pain – that is, consciousness.<sup>218</sup>

Within 'Revolt of the Body', Hijikata's attempted to assimilate images of Bellmer's deformed and fragmented female figures together with a soundtrack of Antonin Artaud's screams, alongside his own, starved and emaciated body within what he described as an 'anatomical mutation'<sup>219</sup>. Bellmer's description of the body as language - to be constructed by the individual viewer - provides an initial diversion from some of those logocentric values ascribed to the notation of dance as discussed earlier. In contrast to those mnemonic imprints found within the symmetric physical forms upheld by, for example, the western ballet dancer, Bellmer's considered his dissipated figures as 'corporeal anagrams', which must be reconstructed on an individual basis, each viewer assembling his or her own meaning out of a variety of perspectives. Similarly, it

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid

<sup>217</sup> Zarrilli 2004: 660

<sup>218</sup> Kurihara, N., 'Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh' in *The Drama Review* Vol.44 (1) Spring 2000:12

<sup>219</sup> Barber 2006:68

is Ko's multiple physical attentiveness which endows his movement with a rich array of images, words and sensations, and presents the spectator with an alternate strategy for viewing the body through individual associations, as based on a reflexive spectator gaze. The final result of Ko's performance can be regarded as a critical 'playing out' of a scene of pain, moving fluidly between physiological sensation, corporeal memory and pathos as effect. The result is atavistic, universally sanctioned at the threshold of our ability as audience here to be affected - to think, feelingly.

*Ko's performance as speech-act hurls words at us with the raw utterance of statement  
our passiveness is not a weakness here but a subservience, a willingness to suspend  
control,*

*to increase our expectation of desire  
where abjection and repulsion become bedmates in an unspoken contract.*

*His body is sublimated in sensual awakening  
bathed in perception to the point of distorting its own identity, hunger, appetite.*

*Words forced into statements violate our sanctioned witness post  
that cannot separate form from meaning, image from content.*

*Time condenses and expands  
Its stain contaminating the space,  
subjugating responses to primordial, instinctive reaction.*

*Body eclipses image as human figures are hinted at.*

*It is not his cry but all humanities.*

(Epitaph)

*We are no longer sure what it is that we are looking at  
Virtuosity, then, leads us into estrangement – seduced and abandoned  
Ko's eyes look out from across the surfaces of his body and in that moment of watching  
We are blind.*

The final chapter returns the work on physical consciousness to an embedded perspective, examining its role within my own site-based choreographic work. Where previous chapters situated physical consciousness in butoh in relation to training and receptive mechanisms, as to viewing processes, this final chapter looks at the process of accumulating movement ideas working outdoors, which requires the dancer to constantly engage in a double exposure between those external stimuli present, inner

forms created in response to such stimuli, and the articulation of movement qualities. In doing so, I locate physical consciousness as a continual translation between sensation (sourced from external stimuli), memory (embedded corporeal) and movement expression through the establishment of choreographic materials for stage purposes. Issues raised in the present chapter surrounding spectatorship are further developed from an embedded critique, where I work closely with the camera, integrating its uses within my own documentation processes, following Mulvey's notion of possessive spectatorship, in an attempt to further interrogate notions of agency on the part of the dancer.

**Introduction**

What has developed out of a pedagogical engagement with butoh as facilitated by both Su-En and Minako Seki is predisposed towards the notion of the dysfunctional body in performance in pursuing the conditions that might enable the dancer to achieve a range of movement possibilities (albeit within the ‘dysfunctional’ - what I take here to mean non-kinaesthetic, non-symmetrical, disjointed and syncopated movement), towards an emerging practice which is primarily located outdoors, in response to the particular conditions of any given environment. Underlying an inquiry into developing movement vocabulary from a particular terrain, the terms ‘proprioception’, ‘perception’ and ‘perspective’ are examined below in relation to the sense-perceptions of the performer and will be tested through a series of practical case studies in the form of facilitated artist workshops. Where Seki’s training provided a verbal series of animalistic and elemental images in order to stimulate the student’s imagination in the studio, this final chapter focuses on transferring some of the movement principles inherent to both Su-En and Seki’s teachings towards site-specific movement inquiry, where the dancer is confronted with the immediate material reality of textures, sounds, smells and sights from which to further develop movement repertoire. Chapter Two considers both Su-En and Seki’s training methods as distinct approaches to using word and movement in butoh dance, derived from imagistic exercises both within outdoor and indoor environs. Su-En’s training method in particular details the actual materiality of animate matter using pictures, diagrams and visual images as well as through creating immersive conditions, such as an inhabitation project where her students live on a chicken farm for several days in order to engage fully with the movement conditions of birds. Seki’s teaching uses detailed verbal descriptions, often mixing German and Japanese language with English, to evoke sensation in her dancers. My role as Writer in Residence during Seki’s intensive workshop program focused on the relationship of language and meaning production in dance, while working within a multilingual group emphasised the various distinct use of physical metaphor, revealing the cultural specificity of language in relation to dance, as well as highlighting differences between individual subjective responses to given verbal images.

This final chapter introduces my choreographic research processes, starting with the construction of a solo butoh dance work, 'Spilt'. This performance blends elements of both Seki and Su-En's training, drawing from both external, site based research, working in West Kerry, Ireland and also studio research, developed at Trent Park Studios in Middlesex University during summer 2004. In such a way, the production process emphasises the transfer of choreographic materials from working 'in-situ' using raw data in the form of sensorial information to the refinement of movement vocabulary within a theatrical setting. Embedded throughout the following chapter will be references to visual documentation in the form of DVD footage profiling rehearsal and production methods which should be consulted throughout.

While my movement practice and training ethos is founded on certain philosophical principles inherent to butoh, its related dance discipline, Body Weather is introduced in this section as sharing a similar cultural and historical root with butoh.<sup>220</sup> Body Weather is a contemporary Japanese performance practice and holistic physical training system, founded by butoh dancer Min Tanaka in the 1970s and developed under his company *Mai Juku* at his farm in northern rural Japan. Body Weather practice was initially cultivated through Tanaka's immediate relation to his rural surrounds and can be said to promote the idea the human body as an open vessel, constantly changing like the weather, and employs immersive processes of inhabitation, duration and exposure towards some of the following lines of movement inquiry: an investigation of the body's relationship to gravity; identification and synthesis of a range of movement qualities and their differences, physical principles and performance vocabularies. While both Body Weather and butoh share the perception of the dance body as an interdependent entity subsisting as part of the ecology of its surrounding environments, Body Weather practice has evolved a distinct methodological approach that emphasises technical discipline in developing physical stamina through a holistic training system termed MB – Mind/Body – Muscle/Bone, which will be further defined later in this section.

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<sup>220</sup> In May 2004 I participated in a nine day intensive training program with Body Weather practitioner Stuart Lynch (UK). This course introduced participants to daily training in MB and also provided a forum for performance research, leading to a public presentation of work on the final day. Following this intensive I have attended courses with Frank Van Der Ven, a Dutch based Body Weather practitioner whose teaching is disseminated through both studio and site-based workshop training. Both Van Der Ven and Lynch trained and worked with Min Tanaka during the early nineties in Japan. Finally, between 2005 and 2007 I have attended regular Body Weather training through weekly training and performance research sessions in London lead by Australian Body Weather practitioner, Marnie Orr.

Thus, my terms of engagement are located somewhere between a primary trainee and receiver of established knowledge systems and a recycler or interpreter of their principles - my pedagogic engagement in both these practices indicating a turn or shift away from an established set of principles, towards independent choreographic practice. As outlined in my introduction, these principles are distilled within an interdisciplinary long term inquiry into movement and physicality within site-specific dance practice, as identified within varying qualitative states found within any given terrain. In particular, some of the research findings for this inquiry will be adapted from shared forums, through collective writings and discussions formed through regular workshops that I have co-facilitated under the role of joint Artistic Director of *ROCKface*, an ongoing dance research collaboration between myself and Body Weather dancer, Marnie Orr<sup>221</sup>.

Finally, while I have chosen the terms ‘perspective’, ‘proprioception’ and ‘perception’ to provide an embedded critique of my individual choreographic methods, in applying a movement practice steered by principles underlying butoh and Body Weather to an outdoor context, I acknowledge those potential and stated areas of interdisciplinary engagement within the respective fields of ecology, geography, cartography and their knowledge bases.<sup>222</sup> Thus, in addition to an interrogation of the dancer’s body as a residual site for qualitative sense stimuli and related movement vocabularies, the research on offer here aims towards developing a movement vocabulary embedded in the dancers’ immediate and sensorial responses driven by the ecological and geological conditions of the chosen rural environment. Furthermore, a modern-day palimpsest is aimed for where the choreographic process is generated initially through those movements acquired in the immediate vicinity of working on site and, subsequently, re-created through their inscription, or refinement, towards performance production outcomes, cited below through the choreographic development processes surrounding my solo work ‘Spilt’.

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<sup>221</sup> *ROCKface* was formed by Orr & Sweeney in 2005 with the intention of creating a new compositional blueprint for long-term collaboration in dance practice. The language *ROCKface* works with has evolved from challenging established dance vocabularies through exchanging dialogue with other artists from non-performance disciplines, and scientists.

<sup>222</sup> A considerable amount of contemporary dance discourse has regrouped within interdisciplinary arts practice, expanding into the discourses of physical geography, ecology and the New Sciences. Notable developments can be traced to recently formed collaborative research organizations, *Bonemap* in Australia (<http://www.bonemap.com>) and *Live Arts Garden Initiative* ([www.liveartgardeninitiative.org.uk](http://www.liveartgardeninitiative.org.uk)), an interdisciplinary artists collective based in Goldsmiths College, London, who facilitate artist lead seminars in immersivity, art, architecture, sound and ecology.



## Documented Performance Work: *SPILT*

See Video Link *SPILT* DVD: 0.16 – 3.32

*Spilt* is a 20 minute solo movement work which was developed at Middlesex University during my first year of PhD study, the movement ideas for which were originally conceived of as a site-specific piece, derived from field research in the west coast of Ireland.<sup>223</sup> Developed during summer 2004, *Spilt* applies the notion of ‘physical synaesthesia’, where stated movement qualities developed in the transfer from initial responses to those textures, sights and sounds encountered during my experiences on site, back to the studio were further crafted into set choreographic material. While the choreographic material in *Spilt* draws from a series of physical responses as based on my sensory responses to a chosen repertoire of images and sensations derived from the particular coastal landscape of western Ireland, my aim within the performance was to extend my body’s relation to this particular environment by perceiving the audience as an extension of that landscape. Thus, the performance attempts to represent the body as a kind of poetic landscape in which rocks, sheep bones and twisted metal provide the raw materials for generating the conditions for movement while the jagged and barren landscape of this particular geological site provide a specific physical landscape to respond to, both within and without of the confines of the studio.

In autumn 2004, I produced *Spilt* as part of a triple-bill of butoh influenced solo performance works, titled ‘Fine Mesh’, together with butoh dancers Nicola Gibbons and April Nunes<sup>224</sup>. Some of the research terms pertinent to my choreographic inquiry were presented to the audience in the form of program notes and an email sent to the invited audience (including PhD peers and my supervisor at Middlesex University). This performance event toured to several universities including the University of Roehampton and Middlesex University, and included a public presentation at the Jerwood Dance Space in London. ‘Fine Mesh’ was the title conceived in response to the

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<sup>223</sup> *Spilt* takes its inspiration from the various indigenous rock and mineral sources found in the particularly porous landscape coastal region of West Kerry, Ireland, which is populated by several abandoned famine huts from the late nineteenth century. One of my decisions for continuing site-based choreographic research on Dartmoor in 2006/07 was that the terrain is notably similar to that of western Ireland. Both share similar geomorphic properties and, furthermore, the barrenness indigenous to both locations can be seen to support similar flora and fauna species.

<sup>224</sup> I first met with Nicola and April in a choreographic forum at the Place Dance Centre where we were involved in a three week research program with butoh choreographer Fran Barbe, as part of the Choreodrome Festival 2002. Following this project we went on to perform *Palpitation*, a large scale ensemble butoh dance work with Fran Barbe Butoh Dance Company at Jackson’s Lane Theatre in 2003.

chosen scenographic elements of each individual performance work. The three solo works evolved in collaboration with lighting designer and sceneographer Helen Pringle, weaving together the separate strands of each individual stage and costume design to create an environment that would respond to the effects of each separate performance event. The three solo works involved interchangeable lighting and scenic materials which were recycled and incorporated into each others' performances. For example, Nicola Hayne's solo work, *In Vitro*, uses a square frame of light to confine the body for the entire duration of the piece which later marks the entry point for *Spilt*. The costume for *Spilt* is used at the start of the performance as a film projection screen, which then becomes wrapped around my body while the projected images transfer from cloth to my skin. Finally, April Nunes's performance utilises a costume which, when split, spills feathers over the stage, lit by the suspended lighting frame from *In Vitro*. Thus, scenic elements were integrated within the choreographic choices at work, representing an extension of the physical landscapes that involved both performer and set. The intention of sharing the sceneographic space between three separate yet interrelated solo works was to create a set of intersubjective phenomena that could be applied to an expert spectator reading of the three dancers' bodies as organic matter within a constantly eroding landscape, supporting the notion of butoh dance material as developing in synthesis with a particular scenic landscape or environment, subscribing to Su-En's claim that

Butoh seeks change, transformation. Just like the landscape around the body changes, the landscape within the body also changes. Forms are erased and appear where we least expect it. The dance, the butoh, is the act that materializes a longing to make change and transformation take over.<sup>225</sup>

In addition to the above, the particular performance conditions for *Spilt* were deliberately constructed from an ethological engagement with a stated range of animal and mineral materials as derived from this particular coastal landscape. Deleuze's writings on the subject of ethology (1988) provide a useful definition of the term as similar to that of 'an animal (as) never separable from its relations with the world. The interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior a projected interior'.<sup>226</sup> Deleuze's proposal can be applied here to the opening section of the piece where I consider the

<sup>225</sup> Su-En *Body in the Landscape* trans. Line Berg, 'Uppsala Nya Tidning' newspaper article, June 2001.

<sup>226</sup> Deleuze, G. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. R. Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988)

image of a cormorant bird squatting on a rock face. Close examination of the bird's wing structure during the performance research process revealed a kind of grid like structure which contains a boxed system of movement comprising four right angles to generate the wing movement. The architecture of a bird's wing bone here provided the material for generating isolated movements within the shoulder as I identified a range of movements which offers a potential interface for new movement structures applied to the human anatomy. Equally, working from a visual premise, the idea of the gaze of the bird provides a means for engaging the extremes of visual perspective, from a microscopic to a telescopic gaze.

*squatting on warm rock, hovering over the water's edge  
backs of hand spread their surfaces and gather heat  
warm solace in old faded tunes  
grandmothers melody sings through broken shell lungs  
head is a slow metronome; horizon keeps a steady pulse  
colour, all in blues, saturates and deepens the throat  
sound pours over skin, warms the joints  
moving through easy suck and pull  
upwards only  
caught between sky and sea  
cloth gathers swirling around legs as the hand turns a skull piece  
shrapnel splinters bone, interlocking ribs  
a small cormorant strains out of the mouth  
cragged tiny tongue with beady eyes  
fingers search for gull eggs hidden in billowing folds  
rattling bones turn metal to stone  
ears search the horizon  
echoing primal rhythms.<sup>227</sup>*

The movement principles adhered to in the creation of *Spilt* attempt to describe in performance terms, the ability to split focus between the externalised aesthetic presentation of structured choreographic material while maintaining a heightened awareness of those embedded internalised processes which occur in cultivating movement material on-site. Thus, my task was to engage in a continuous dialogue between those direct perceptual experiences encountered within a particular environment, their re-establishment through structured choreographic materials, and their application within the pre-established conditions of the altered performance space, as outlined above. The particular relationship of memory, sensation, word, image and movement generated in the above performance process produces a further definition of

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<sup>227</sup> Poetic text developed during my solo rehearsal process in response to an observation exercise in West Kerry, Ireland, September 2004.

physical consciousness as an interface between the above respective positions. Furthermore, the ability to shift from an external perspective to an internalised one (e.g., holding a sheep's skull bone in my hand - as cited above – I become aware of my own rib cage) can be described here in terms of an exchange of properties, in following an ethological engagement with those material objects presented. In registering the weight and the texture and temperature of the skull I can identify a kind of material exchange where I have *already equated* the properties of the sheep's skull with similar material properties in my own anatomy, so there is a simultaneous transference from the outside to the inside and the inside outside. In such a way, engaging with the image of bone, as in the text above, relates to the intricacies of certain sensations and their immediate physical / physiological manifestation in the body at any given moment. While I had placed the skull in my hand and was equating its weight in proportion to my own skull, I was fully engaged in a *transfer of properties* into the body, while at the same time experiencing a displacement, or transference of my own body weight. Such an exchange of properties is much more than a process of symbiosis; rather than simply appropriating or investing the body with the image, or feel, or texture of bone, it suggests that the receptive state of the body in that situation must enable a transformation of self at the most basic level, which is more than a physical match of body and material. Similar to Su-En's 'Natural Body' training methods, the essential work of the MB (Mind/Body, Muscle/Bone) training in Body Weather is to prepare the body for such an exchange, by creating this sense of availability. This concept of transfer of properties is further illustrated in the attached DVD which describes my working methods of developing movement material in the interaction with a burnt tree.<sup>228</sup>

## Critique of Spilt

'Ma' is the name given to the Japanese concept that space and time are both subjective and experiential. A given time cue of five seconds within a particular butoh choreography can vary from one evening to the next, according to many factors. The butoh body must remain always sensitized to both the space it occupies and also the space occupying the body. The distance that exists between this internal and external dialogue allows for reaction to occur, whether in response to sound, to imagination or to

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<sup>228</sup> See DVD video link 10.20 – 10.45m.

other external cues. Just as the image engaged with might specify a particular momentum, or charge of units passing through the body, those movement forms I articulate in performing *Spilt* can be seen to follow a singular exchange rate between the internal momentum created in the body and its articulation of each material form, where this charge or momentum must also take its context from the landscape surrounding the body. Su-En challenges the ‘myth’ of slow motion which is so readily ascribed to butoh in comparison with traditional western theatrical dance, where she describes the butoh performer as not moving slower, or less but rather operating in smaller units of movement.<sup>229</sup> Slowness, according to Lepecki, can educate us in new ways of seeing:

Like conversation, some choreographic processes and practices school us in slowness, and the qualities of attention that allow what is happening to happen and to take (a) place.<sup>230</sup>

Lepecki initially ascribes former Judson Theatre member and Contact Improvisation practitioner, Steve Paxton’s term “introspective proprioception”<sup>231</sup> as pertinent to slow motion in movement:

As the subject stands still, listening, sensing, smelling its own bodily vibrations [...], within the space between core subjectivity and the surface of the body, there is nothing more than the revelation of an infinite, unlocatable space for microexploration of the multiple potential for otherwise unsensed subjectivities and corporealities one harbours.<sup>232</sup>

Both descriptions above are useful in describing my approach to sustaining my engagement in those material elements listed in the creation of the work. As stated above, the choreographic language aimed for was mediated between direct sensory states and their recreation and refinement in choreographic composition. However, in order to achieve a sense of those immersive conditions present in the original construction of the material working on site, while enabling a thorough physiological and conscious application of these images and sensory based data, I found it difficult to fully acknowledge the presence of an audience. Following the completion of performances of *Spilt*, I collated audience and peer responses over several months which, coupled with a review of the filmed documentation of the work, enabled me to

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<sup>229</sup> Derived from teaching communication, Su-En Butoh workshop training, Sweden 2000.

<sup>230</sup> ‘Conversations on Choreography’ in *Performance Research* Vol.8 No.4 2003 p. 65 (co-authored article: Scott DeLahunta, Isabelle Ginot, Myriam van Imschoot, Andre Lepecki, Susan Rethorst, Diana Theodores, David Williams)

<sup>231</sup> This term is used by Steve Paxton, to describe the hyper attentive experience of perceiving movement. Paxton, S., in *Contact Quarterly* Vol.3 (1) 1977 cited in Lepecki 2000:346

<sup>232</sup> Lepecki, 2000: 346

develop a retrospective analysis of the work. A reflective evaluation of this solo performance work revealed certain weaknesses in terms of its communication processes. While working in consultation with the other dancers Nunes and Gibbons to establish clear sceneographic choices for the work, the energetic quality throughout my solo remained too internalised to stay accountable to an outside perspective. The result was that during the live presentation of *Spilt* my own presence as a performer arguably remained distant from my audience. Equally, the direct engagement with stated materials such as bone and rock did not account for the transformation of these same objects within the context of theatrical production, where they could be conceived as 'stage props'. Furthermore, the apparent physical tension sustained throughout the forty minute performance delivered a suppressed energetic quality which may have been resolved through the application of more conventional rhythmic phrasing.

Such criticisms appear to echo many of the concerns I initially had in staging the work whilst still trying to find a balance in my choreographic methods between internal crafting and external or aesthetic presentation. Following this initial research undertaking I decided to focus my practical methods on the further cultivation of performance vocabulary through immersive site based inquiry, using participant dancers to develop potential choreographic materials. The following section considers the role of the virtual in providing a particular sense arrangement both on the part of the dancer - as a tool for engaging the imagination in the re-creation of corporeal sensory memory for the purposes of movement repertoire - and, furthermore, as a key strategy that can be employed in transferring movement materials from site back to studio, for the purposes of performance.

### ***Surface Tensions: Body and Site***

Between 2005-2007, I have facilitated a range of outdoor immersive movement projects<sup>233</sup> based on an interrogation of the dancer's processes of perception, focusing on those procedures surrounding the immediate sensations that the dancer's body may be presented with outdoors through a series of tasks such as walking, running, standing and

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<sup>233</sup> These workshops have taken place between 2005-2007 in a range of locations, including Dartmoor National Park, Devon (March and Sept 2007) and Middlesex University studios at Trent Park and its surrounding parkland. The participating dancers were chosen on the basis of previous performance experience in butoh and Body Weather, many of whom I have collaborated with in separate performance projects during the past six years.

lying in the surrounding landscape. Here, the dancer is exposed to certain temperature conditions, olfactory and textural data as well as sonic and visual information, all of which can be said to trigger their own immediate stimuli for further movement responses. I am primarily interested in identifying, within the following site-based movement workshops, ways in which the physical and qualitative responses registered by those participating dancers, might be transplanted back into studio practice, and further transcribed with the aim of creating a template of movement repertoire based on the corporeal embedded responses of each dancer to his or her experiences working on site. My aim throughout the workshops outlined below, was to facilitate a range of sensory based movement directives within a particular terrain, in an attempt to create a visual representation of both place and body's interaction through a kind of spatial arrangement mnemonic – that could be produced as a kind of three dimensional map, or living document that reflects some of those experiences. I argue here that experiences of spatiality created in those distances held between the body's three-dimensional frame and its surrounding landscape provide a new context for movement. As such, one of the aims of the present writing is to locate the dancing body within site-specific contemporary performance practice as a locus that reflects current cultural and critical debates. In particular, I consider the term 'site' as a culturally constructed process formed through the body's cognitive interactions, and based on its ability to articulate a range of physical and critical responses to its interior (anatomical) and exterior (environmental) conditions. To this end, an initial critique of the term 'site-specific' within contemporary visual arts culture provides a useful preface here.

James Meyer, writing on site specific visual arts practices since the early 1960s, initially distinguishes between site as a functional space and a literal, physical place:

[...] (T)he functional site may or may not incorporate a physical place. It certainly does not privilege this place. Instead it is a process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and textual filiations and the bodies that move between them (the artists above all).<sup>234</sup>

Similar to the efforts of those pioneering postmodern US choreographers cited in Chapter One, whose experimental site-based performances succeeded in shifting dance audiences out of a black box setting and into streets, galleries and shopping centres,

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<sup>234</sup> Meyer, J (1995) 'The Functional Site', or, 'The Transformation of Site Specificity' in *Documents* 7 Fall (1996), 25

early site-specific arts practices arguably share emphasis with the North American postmodern dance movement in challenging the political economy of the art work as commoditised object. Elsewhere, Meyer points to the predominant appraisal of the visual art object as a permanent fixture within modernist art, arguably pertained towards a commercially operative market which remained fixed within a closed currency which was sanctioned by western evaluative mechanisms.<sup>235</sup> Such aesthetic agenda's clearly divided 'high' and 'low' art forms, as Carol Martin (1996) suggests:

The disintegration of aesthetic dichotomies (ie. binary classifications) and boundaries such as 'high' and 'low' is part of the dissolution of modernism. Modern western society is/was actually and theoretically based on clear distinctions of class, race, ethnicity, nation, language and religion.[...] Classical Western aesthetics are based on 'seeing', on maintaining enough distance between the object of art and the persons viewing that object.<sup>236</sup>

By placing the art work within a non permanent and singularly denoted space, the site-specific practice mode can be seen to override such a privileged positioning of the art object, while removing the automatic evaluative structures that support and valorise the object itself when placed within established conventional art settings such as the gallery or exhibition centre. Whereas the act of viewing an art work can be ascribed, within modernist terms, to an objective positioning, Meyer further suggests how 'the body of site specificity was a physicalized body, aware of its surroundings, a body of heightened critical acuity.'<sup>237</sup> Historically, Meyer cites the initial emergence of site-specific visual arts practices as proceeding Minimalism:

Minimalism displaced the object of reflection another degree – from the work's medium to its ambient space, from its optical and tactile qualities as painting and sculpture to the perceptual conditions of its display.<sup>238</sup>

In prioritising the sensory engagement of the viewer, Meyer's statement echoes Lepecki's proposition for a new schema for a theory of dance whereby he suggests how the written word might be replaced by the optical, '[...] the optical by the aural, the aural by the tactile, the tactile by the olfactory, the olfactory by the proprioceptive.'<sup>239</sup> Both

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid:25

<sup>236</sup> Martin, C (1996) 'High Critics / Low Art' in *Moving Words- re-writing dance* (ed) Gail Morris Routledge: London.

<sup>237</sup> Meyer 1995:26

<sup>238</sup> Ibid:27

<sup>239</sup> Lepecki, A. 'Manically charged presence' in *Ballet International/Tanz Aktuell Yearbook* Friedrich Berlin, 1999: 25



Lepecki and Meyer, in advocating agency on the part of the spectator, can be seen to adhere to what Meyer suggests of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, in perceiving the art object in dynamic relation to its surrounds:

Thus the premise of site-specificity to locate the work in a single place, and only there, bespoke the 1960s call for Presence, the demand for the experience of "being there". An underlying topos of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, of the happening and performance, Presence became an aesthetic and ethical *cri de couer* among the generation of artists and critics who emerged in the 1960s [...].<sup>240</sup>

While the present research provides ample material for developing a critique of the performer's body in relation to contemporary visual arts site-specific practices, the current debate is focused on an interrogation of the sensory roles engaged by the dancer in developing potential performance material from a range of specified rural environments. Thus, in acknowledging the considerable political implications of transferring visual arts terminology within another discourse<sup>241</sup>, the use of the term site-specific will be applied here in relation to the investigation of a particular terrain: i.e. those present conditions specific to the stated environment, and their ensuing effects on the dance body through sense-perception. Subsequently, the term 'site' will be adopted to reference several positions: as a chosen location to work within; the creation of a site for studying movement; and the critical reflection on the body as a site for embedded corporeal experience and cultural activity.

In order to further distinguish between 'site' and 'terrain' before proceeding to establish some of the processes surrounding the creation of solo and group choreographic material outdoors, it is useful at this point, to provide some alternative definitions of the terms place and its relationship to the body, as discussed here by writer and dancer, Karen Vedel. In her article titled 'Dancing Country'<sup>242</sup>, Vedel initially cites anthropologist Marc Auge's definition of non-place as that which is '[...] in opposition to anthropological place; [...] formed through shared references and local complicit

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid:26

<sup>241</sup> For further ethical debate surrounding the assimilation of the term site-specific to a range of visual and performance art practices within a late 20<sup>th</sup> century dominant popular culture, see Kwon, M. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press: 2004).

<sup>242</sup> Vedel, K. 'Dancing Country' in *Dance Metropolis Province. German Yearbook on Dance Research* (eds.) Hardt, Y. and Maar, K (Sept. 2007). Karen Vedel is a dance anthropologist who worked with Tess de Quincy's Body Weather project, 'Dictionary of Atmospheres' and 'Triple Alice': a series of interdisciplinary intensive laboratories in site specific movement practice which took place in Hamilton Downs near Alice Springs, Central Australia during 2005. Vedel participated as a Writer in Residence during the 'Triple Alice' project with the De Quincy Company.

knowledge of events and associations, whereas non-place is realized in the travelling over or passing through anthropological place.<sup>243</sup> How, then, might the terms ‘country’, ‘site’ and ‘body’ start to apply to a consideration of space and place within a given terrain for choreographic research purposes? Vedel further suggests that the term site generally implies a place that has been cleared or prepared, emptied for human consumption. She also connotes a designated public area - set apart for the purposes of social or culturally significant activity - for example, an archaeological excavation.<sup>244</sup> In contrast, Vedel cites the Australian aboriginal definition of ‘country’ as denoting a place of origin in a literal, cultural as well as a spiritual sense, differing to common English usage of the term (the latter referring in the main to a ‘nation state’ or that which stands outside of urbanized cities).<sup>245</sup> Dance anthropologist Andre Grau further suggests that for the indigenous Tiwi people in Northern Australia, *language* is country – whereas to the Arrrente people in central Australia, *body* is country.<sup>246</sup> This latter definition suggests an inclusive and shared set of references that place the body in a dynamic and symbiotic relation with its environment. Such a symbiosis can be argued to allow for the specific characteristics of a place to affect its dwellers within a holistic or ecological framework. In the words of Casey, cited in Vedel:

[...] a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting those qualities in its own constitution and description, expressing them in its occurrence as an event- Places are not just as – they happen, and are by definition embodied.<sup>247</sup>

Vedel’s cultural citations of body and landscape provide a useful alternate perspective in positioning the dancer in direct relation to his/her environmental surrounds, whereby the dancer can be said to operate within an ecological system, whereby the site-specific performance practice mode implies a process of writing over places already written on; the act of site-specific performance, thus assigns a reflexive meaning, both intervening and commenting on the inherent conditions of space and place.<sup>248</sup> As opposed to the neutrality of a ‘blank canvas’ studio, the notion of a palimpsest is useful here as a means of identifying the layering process that occurs in identifying a location for my research

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<sup>243</sup> Augé, M (1995) *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso Books, cited in Vedel, K (2006) ‘Dancing Country’ in Hardt, Y. and Maar, K. (eds.) *Dance Metropolis Province. German Yearbook on Dance Research* (Sept. 2007).

<sup>244</sup> Vedel 2006:2

<sup>245</sup> Ibid:1

<sup>246</sup> Grau cited in Vedel 2006:2

<sup>247</sup> Casey, E.S. (1998) *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*. University of California Press, cited in Vedel 2006:1

<sup>248</sup> Casey E.S. (1998) *The fate of place: a philosophical history* University of California Press. Paraphrased in Vedel 2006: 2.

inquiry within a site that already contains its own cultural and historical meaning through climate and ecological processes as well as through human intervention. It is worth noting in addition here, the historic preoccupation between site and body in Japanese art post World War II:

Japanese art after World War II derived from action and developed around issues of body and place. Physical and site specific works examined the relationship of the appropriate body expression with the elements of place and environment.<sup>249</sup>

The research methodology employed in the following section calibrates responses from a week of immersive site-specific movement workshops, as facilitated by myself and Marnie Orr under the collaborative title of *ROCKface*. While the following practical research is facilitated under the collective title of *ROCKface*, the series of movement directives outlined underneath represent my independent choreographic research. A full transcript of an interview with Orr further focuses on the lineage of Body Weather, in particular looking at ethical issues regarding the development of Body Weather in as well as a further description of the work of *ROCKface*.<sup>250</sup>

In establishing the following terms of engagement, I acknowledge that I am working with a quality that can be labelled ‘sentient,’ possibly aligned with a notion of “feeling” as a widely recognised mode of engagement and decision-making on the part of practitioners. German dancer and choreographer Eva Schmale initially differentiates between the ‘sensing body’ and the ‘thinking body’ within her movement work; *lieb* - an old German word for the body implying life, or experience as opposed to *körper* which infers thinking body.<sup>251</sup> Zarrilli, writing in 2004, provides a further distinction through a phenomenological lens:

Rejecting the exclusive assumption of the natural sciences and modern psychology that treated the physical body (Körper) as a thing, object, instrument, or machine under the command or control of an all-knowing mind, and thereby challenging the Cartesian cogito, Merleau-Ponty (re)claimed the centrality of the lived body (Lieb) and embodied experience as the very means and medium through which the world comes into being and is experienced.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Osaki 1998; Munroe 1994 in Fraleigh 2006:74

<sup>250</sup> Please see Appendix Materials ‘Adaptable Bodies’ interview. London, November 2007.

<sup>251</sup> Allsopp, R. and De Lahunta, S. (eds.) ‘Sensual Unrest’ in *The Connected Body? An Interdisciplinary Approach to Body and Performance* Amsterdam Readings on the Arts and Arts Education, Amsterdam School of the Arts, 1996.

<sup>252</sup> Zarrilli 2004: 654-655

There is a question of ethics involved in attempting to discuss sensation or sense quality which remains, for the most part, subjective. Particularly, in the case of experiential movement practice, Loukes suggests potential difficulties in working within a subjective experiential inquiry mode. As such, my research aims to identify and deconstruct physiological processes engaged in by those participating dancers, in registering sense, balance, temperature and texture, while simultaneously translating these experiences towards self directed movement practice. Loukes further outlines the problems of working from intuitive connections on the part of a participant-observer within research: '[t]he problem when working with my own experience, and that of others, is avoiding the subjectification of the practices, and reification of the experiences.'<sup>253</sup>

Research with the body and surround, through accessing out-of-awareness perceptions is a performative floodgate. This is resistance to culturally acquired and learned perceptions that restrict cognitive response to organism and environment interrelationships. Interpretation of environmental perception as subjective interrelationships allows a deepening embodiment. It is demarcation that articulates as body topography, and performance map where the territory expands across the virtual and the visceral.<sup>254</sup>

In deference to the above statement, my research process is predicated upon the notion that we locate ourselves in a particular place through embodied experience. An initial model outlining my research methods and terms of inquiry into site-based movement research can be found below, while cross-referenced throughout this section will be video and photographic materials, as well as journalistic writings which contain the main component of my practical research undertakings.

***ROCKface workshops: Dartmoor National Park, Devon, 2007.***<sup>255</sup>

The following movement directives are transcribed from two workshop intensives, which took place during March and Sept 2007, involving 5 participants, all of whom had some butoh or Body Weather experience. Each of the below directives are cross

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<sup>253</sup> Loukes 2003:57

<sup>254</sup> 'Introduction' in <http://www.bonemap.com/2003/approach.html> Accessed on 07/07/08

<sup>255</sup> Dartmoor is one of Great Britain's finest heritage National Park lands. Stretching over 368 square miles, it houses unique geological and archaeological features as found within large scale granite structures called 'Torrs'.

referenced with recorded visual documentation, and should be read in conjunction with the attached DVD.

### Research Aims and Methodology Chart for Practice as Research

Research Aims	Site/field based	Critical Context	Methods undertaken
<p><i>Cross Cultural Dialogue:</i> adapting principles of Butoh and Bodyweather toward site driven choreographic research</p> <p>Develop site based dance vernacular</p> <p>Facilitate critical exploration of site</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● self reflexive</li> <li>● participatory / experimentation</li> <li>● creative development</li> </ul>	<p>Dartmoor National Park</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● geological conditions</li> <li>● hidden and exposed narratives (local fact/myth construction)</li> </ul> <p>Scientific study of the dance body in relation to elemental matter, gravity and sensation.</p>	<p><i>Interdisciplinary Dialogue</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● geology</li> <li>● cartography</li> </ul> <p>Choreography as a cartographic process</p> <p>Comparative research case studies in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ecology</li> <li>● Sustainability</li> <li>● Physical Geography</li> <li>● Psycho-geography.</li> </ul>	<p>Develop Notation: - produce a <i>Glossary of terms</i></p> <p><i>Collecting Data</i> - map making materials - sound recording - video documentation - artist diaries - photographs - participant/observer methods - self/autoethnography</p>

The workshops took the form of 2x week-long residencies, with participants staying in shared accommodation on Dartmoor, with access to a studio for morning training. The structure of the day was divided up as follows:

10-12	MB training and butoh image based movement tasks	<i>Studio</i>
12-2	Lunch and route plan for the day	
2-6	Working on site	<i>range of locations on Dartmoor</i>
6-10	Dinner and group discussion / sharing documentation	<i>Hostel</i>

**Video Link: Analysis of MB Lines DVD 04.00 – 05.00**

‘Mind/Body Muscle/Bone’ is a preparatory movement training system developed by Min Tanaka which is based on the mechanics of the ‘walking body’ in that it follows the direction formed by the participating dance students walking lengthways from one end of the studio to the other and back again, maintaining a constant, flux like movement. Each dancer follows this progression in a row, maintaining equidistance while moving individually along a straight line. The MB ‘lines’ - a ‘line’ denoting each single movement variation, as applied from one end of the studio to the other - develop progressively, from an initial simple walk, repeated in reverse, to jogging and adding contrasting arm and head movements. The focus of the MB work is to develop coordination and stamina, while maintaining an autonomous relationship between the head, the torso and the legs. Interestingly, the floor pattern used within the MB structure can be traced to the outline of the Japanese rice paddy fields as the movement patterns which the dancers follow can be seen to mirror those rotational ones created by the domestic Japanese farmer.

Similarly to Laban’s methodological research into the repetitive movements of factory workers as an effective study for identifying movement structures in modern dance (as discussed in Chapter One), Tanaka’s investment in the mechanics of the working body of the domestic rural labourer is based on achieving maximum physical potential within his dancers. A key aspect within the MB training is the ability of the dance student to develop equal sensitivity moving in all four directions, hence each of the movement ‘lines’ is repeated in reverse. By moving backwards through space, the repetition of progressively complex movement coordinations have the ensuing effect of redirecting the dancer’s dependence on the visual senses, towards achieving further sensitivity to the floor and surrounds through touch and spatial awareness. This concept is further explored below, applied to the context of outdoor movement research (see ‘Walking Backwards: *The Inverse Gaze*’).

## Choreography as a Cartographic Process



The Topographic Body

### **Video link: DVD footage 04.00 – 05.00**

In exploring the role of perception in the transfer from studio to site, working in those relatively wider distances presented outdoors, one of my initial research aims was to generate a contemporary movement vernacular from identified shared terms of reference that could be inscribed through a cartographic document-of-sorts, which then might be further translated as a notation system for site-specific choreographic composition methods. Thus, initial planned activities were chosen according to the particular terrain of a range of locations across Dartmoor, as outlined on a local ordnance survey map. I wanted to avail of the diversity of the landscape from the more sheltered, immediate ancient woodland areas to the barren Torr<sup>256</sup> regions and mountainous terrain. The objective here was to document and notate some of the participants' movement experiences through a three dimensional map that might take into consideration the dancer's location, orientation, and direction as well as speed, weight and mass density. Again, Irigaray's definition of perception as 'establishing a link between those exterior conditions present and individual intention'<sup>257</sup> provides a useful means of locating the individual agency of the dancer here in relation to the

<sup>256</sup> A Torr is the name given to the large granite structures which exist across Dartmoor National Park as the result of oceanic plates sliding and compressing under the earth's continental plate, allowing for large magma particles to break off and rise to the surface, which then cooled to produce granite. (information adapted from an introductory talk by Willem Montagne, Dartmoor National Park Authorities Education Officer)

<sup>257</sup> Irigaray, L. *Irigaray: Key Writings* London Continuum, 2004.

model of a three dimensional map. Dennis Wood (1992) offers an initial definition of the components of maps and their interrelation:

The map image is accompanied by a crowd of signs: titles, dates, legends, keys, scale statements, graphs, diagrams, tables, pictures, photographs, more map images, photographs, emblems, texts, references, footnotes, potentially any device of visual expression. The map gathers up this potpourri of signs and makes of it a coherent and purposeful....*proposition*. How these signs come together is the province of a presentational code, which takes *as content* the relationship among messages resident in the map and offers as expression a structured, ordered, articulated and affective display: a legitimate discourse.<sup>258</sup>



Interactive Map, created by workshop participant, Llewlyn Maire.

One of the research aims in the below movement directive was to create a three dimensional map as a kind of open, or living document that might regard the body as an interactive agent that exists in response to those conditions set out above, yet creates its own discourse by actively changing the signs through the intervention of certain sensory memories (experienced at specified locations). These memories, I proposed, might then be transcribed to paper, forming acute demarcation points, just as a legend, symbol or other sign system serves to denote specific points of consideration within a conventional cartographic document. Initial experiments in transcribing those ephemeral, embodied accounts of sensory interactions accessed in response to the tasks above onto paper produced a kind of overlay of topographic information, thus suggesting a possible synthesis between geographical and anatomical graphic representations. Such an overlay can be described as a palimpsest of interchangeable writing tenses, from the

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<sup>258</sup> Wood, D. *The Power of Maps* (NY & London: The Guilford Press, 1992)



present to the past. By way of further developing this model, future research methods planned will employ the further use of current cartographic applications in the form of Geographic Information Systems<sup>259</sup>, a computer program which enables the viewer/ map reader to separate each layer of topographic information and view selectively. Such a system might go some way towards prioritising different levels of information based on individual perception, while enabling the choreographer to develop singular methods in response to each topographic layer.



ROCKface workshop participants with DNPA Education officer, Willem Montagne, during a basic navigation exercise.

**Video link: The Sensory Body workshop responses 05.55 – 08.15**

**Task:** Sensory Mapping<sup>260</sup>

***Movement Directive:***

*Work with a partner (partner is blindfolded), introducing them to a small ground area using four senses: touch, taste, smell and sound. Try to isolate each sensory encounter, so partner has time to memorise each experience. Afterwards, blindfolded partner aims to map their responses on paper.*

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<sup>259</sup> One of the projected research programs with *ROCKface* in June 2009 is to work with Willem Montagne, Education Officer, DNPA and the University of Plymouth, developing interactive choreographic notation systems based on GIS, to be used within site specific performance by both performers and audience.

<sup>260</sup> It should be noted here, that Sensory Mapping differs from the somatic movement practice of *Authentic Movement*, where, although both tasks are undertaken in partners with the use of blindfold, Authentic Movement focuses on the mover(blindfold) concentrating on internal impulses, while the witness observes and provides feedback. Sensory Mapping is mainly concerned with the mover experiencing impulses, sensations and stimulus from his/her immediate external environment.



*ROCKface* participants engaged in Blindfold exercise



Within the above exercise the guided dancer is fully immersed in his or her environment using distilled perceptual modes. Working blindfold has the effect of distorting his or her visually dominant sense perception, thus disorientating the dancer from their surrounds, while simultaneously highlighting existent sounds or smells which may otherwise go unnoticed. In transcribing the events to paper, each of the participants found that the ‘map’ they produced could only be illustrated through distinct points of reference on the body – their orientation in the space and the sensorial encounters could not be separated. Equally, individual touch and smell sensations became enlarged across specific external surfaces of the body (eg. the smell of moss might be located in the dancer’s back, or the feeling of water across the wrist would become magnified throughout the entire arm). In each instance, participants concluded that working without sight allowed for a more localised and sustained sensation which could still be felt after a considerable time had passed.

In his essay ‘Chaos in the total field of vision’<sup>261</sup> Massumi initially cites some experimental research practices in scientific psychology during the last century to do with the inter-relationship of the senses, in particular the visual senses, termed *Ganzfeld*. In an attempt to

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<sup>261</sup> Massumi 2002: 142-161

create pure isolated vision conditions, experiments were conducted on individual participants to remove all points of visual reference, one example of which was to use ping pong balls cut in two to completely cover the eyeball. The subjects involved in such experiments reported difficulties after some exposure, in determining whether their eyes were in fact open or not: ‘Vision would “blank out”. Pure visual experience resulted in a “complete absence of seeing”’<sup>262</sup>. Such research into the physiological and psychological conditions of vision produced the notion that vision is never ‘pure’ but is always dependent on the other senses. Massumi draws on these and other empirical findings to develop a theory of the gaze as a visceral, proprioceptive bodily faculty towards another sense - that of touch:

What would the equivalent of the pure field of vision be for the sense of touch? If the field of visual experience can be described, phenomenally, as encompassing things from a distance, touch would have to do the opposite: pinpoint things in proximity.<sup>263</sup>

Whereas Massumi’s model for ‘pure field’ of touch or vision implies a lack of orientation and spatial awareness, following the above exercise, each participant found that in transcribing their ‘journey’ to paper, they could not differentiate between the embodied sensory memory of each isolated sonic, tactile, olfactory and taste encounter, and the direction, proximity or spatial orientation that existed in between these positions in space. In such an instance the role of perception can be considered as intra-subjective, whereby the sensation of touch cannot be separated from the experience of orientating oneself in space. This experiment formed the basis for a further inquiry into the ability to ‘map’ our bodies quite literally onto the space while simultaneously identifying particular embodied sensation as points of orientation across any given geographic distance.

**Task:           Body Mapping**

***Movement Directive:***

*The aim is to walk between two defined locations in South West Dartmoor: the base of Grimspound Stone Circle and the King’s Seat approach. The dancers can choose to vary speed, direction and orientation. The south facing part of the stone circle acts as one landmark within touching distance. The distant Hameldown Torr is a direct trajectory of this, though remains at far range.*

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid:145

<sup>263</sup> Ibid:155

Cognitive mapping takes over where orientation stops. The way landmarks function in the actual course of orientation is very different from reading a map. They are what you habitually head for or away from. They trigger headings. Vectors. Landmarks are like magnetic poles that vectorize the space of orientation. A landmark is a minimal visual cue functioning to polarize movement's relation to itself in a way that allows us habitually to flow with preferential heading.<sup>264</sup>

The above movement task, 'Body Mapping', offers some initial insights into how the body might initially adjust to a varying landscape and its relation to objects or landmarks within a defined location. Basic navigational skills initially introduce the map reader to a common technical error in believing a distant landmark perceived through vision to represent the completion of a straight line or trajectory. One of the most common mistakes in geographic orientation methods, is to follow the line of vision directly towards a point of reference within a person's visual horizon. Conversely, the proposed method is to choose an alternate point, bordering either the left or right of the landmark, and head directly towards it. In doing so, the point of focus will remain always on the left or right of the body, *in relation to* their second point of reference.

The term 'cognitive mapping', widely used in the 1980s in Education, provides a useful means - as applied within Masumi's model - through which to describe the process of how the dancer might orientate his or her body in space. Within the given task of moving between chosen vectors, the dancer's experience of switching speeds, changing direction and moving towards or retreating from their chosen landmarks causes a constant readjusting of the body's proximal and spatial relations to these landmarks and also to the perceived edges of the body's vision and touch sense. Thus, perceptions of speed may vary according to the exact location of the dancer (eg. the speed of running forwards downhill is more attainable than the same movement in reverse, going uphill). The emphasis in this movement directive is on developing a new perspective in the shifting distances created between the body and the landscape.

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid:181

Through a constant negotiation with those challenges posed by the immediate environment, the dancer might be said to develop a new sensitivity to the ground underneath. Within this expansion of the dancer's new perimeters, the body's own parameters for movement can also be seen to expand. As the body adapts to the new coordinates of its perceptual limits - the extended projected gaze, uneven footing, temperature changes - perceptions of time and space are also challenged as the body's sensory receptors act, in Lingis's words, 'not as material objects of nature agitated by stimuli, but as organisms capable of perceiving and activating themselves in organized ways.'<sup>265</sup> The dancer's movement imperative here is simultaneously motivated both by his or her immediate responses to an outer perceived reality and by the tangible and embedded reality that occurs within such a synthesis.

The cognitive model assumes that visual cues are somehow used to calculate distances, as if our brains were computers preprogrammed in inches and feet. Isn't it more plausible instead that our bodies are habituated in steps? And that steps relate more directly to other steps than they do to conventional feet? [...] A qualitative space of moving, step-by-step reference accords better with my navigationally competent (if at times cognitively challenged) sense of where I am.<sup>266</sup>

Massumi's model highlights the short failings of a visually dominant system of cognitive recognition which does not account for individual perception as reliant on immediate perception which may vary according to speed, topography, orientation and energy levels. In such a way, the role of vision can be said to be interdependent on the other senses, as the following task further illustrates:

**Task: Walking Backwards: The Inverse Gaze**

***Movement Directive:***

*Walking single file along a straight chosen route, facing backwards and moving forwards. Identify even spaces between each person. The person at the back dictates the speed, when to stop and start. The person at the front must negotiate any obstacles along the way.*

**Video link: Perspective, Proprioception and Perception 09.36 – 10.20**

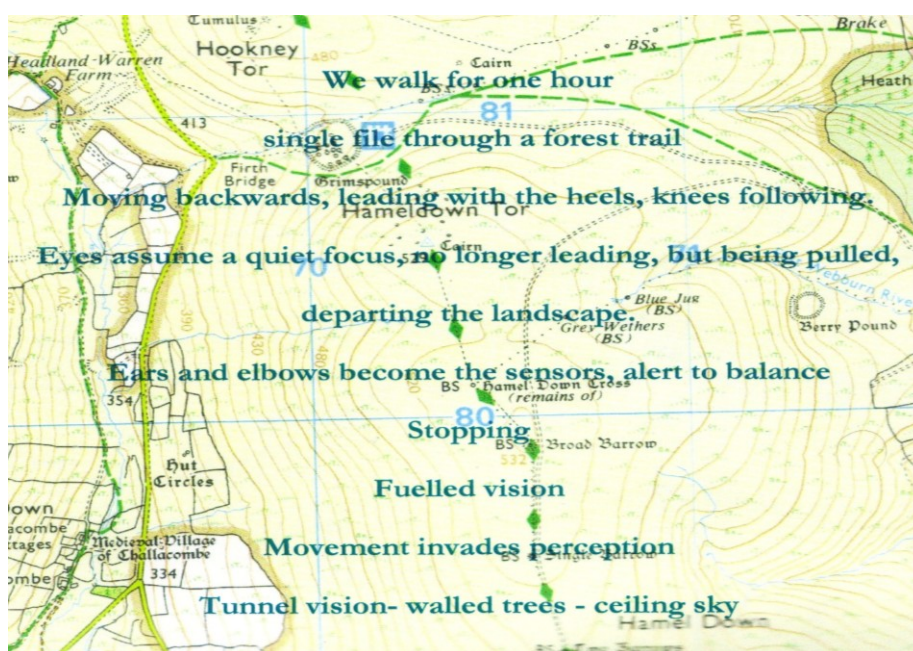
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<sup>265</sup> Lingis 2004:6

<sup>266</sup> Massumi 2002:182



As the body adjusts to walking backward, the direction of the eyes no longer dictates the body's orientation as the primary means of focus, bringing a new awareness of the feet's relation to the ground. The eyes are no longer dominant, controlling the body's orientation, but instead the feet must act as primary receptors, while the peripheral vision has to calculate the spatial arrangement of ground, sky and borders, maintaining an even position in relation to north, south, east and west. Balance becomes an essential component of positioning the dancer in even proximity to his or her surrounds, while attempts to 'soften the gaze' enable the dancer's peripheral vision to expand. By way of further interrogating the interrelation of sense perceptions put forward by Massumi above, this above exercise can be described as an experiment in the relation between the visual and the vestibular senses. The effect of stopping after a relatively short distance is to produce a sense of falling backwards, as though the body were compressed. Simultaneously, the eyes perceive the edges of vision as still moving: in effect, as tunnel vision, as the following description illustrates, written in response to the above movement directive:



Following discussions with the participants, it was concluded that the vestibular senses are interdependent with vision; that a prolonged change in orientation such as walking backwards, causes the inner fluid cased in the ear to shift slightly, subsequently creating the above sensations of disorientation. I am particularly interested in the point where the body begins to substitute its own virtual interface with the surrounding landscape by way of reorienting itself or 'correcting' its perspective through interdependent or symbiotic sense

relation. For example, the relation of the visual and tactile senses can be considered as developing a synthesis where the recognition, or anticipation of certain visually acknowledged objects develops in us a conditioned response similar to that of (virtual) touch. As Massumi further suggests of sensory relations,

You don't have you touch velvet to know that it is soft, presented with a substance you have never seen before you can anticipate its texture. Of course, this ability to see new tactile qualities depends on past touchings of other textures and movements providing continuous visual-tactile feedback.<sup>267</sup>

Subsequently, I argue that Massumi's model suggests a virtual presence, where the 'total field' of visual perception can be seen to fold in on itself through its synthesis with touch, whereby the textural means of the (future) perceived object results in impinging upon and therefore dis-ordering the logic of sight perception. It is precisely this proposition which presents an interesting starting point for the creation of choreographic materials that stem directly from sensory experience and from slipping between imagined/virtual, embodied/sensorial and anticipated/associative states of recognition. This notion of anticipated sensation furthermore provides a useful means of referencing the process of transferring the body's physical memory of experiences and sensations collected within a particular site or landscape, back into a studio environment. Such a notion of transfer formed the main intention behind my solo movement exploration, *Spilt*, discussed above.

***Task Five: Open Body Actions***

***Video Link: Explanation of Open Body Action***

(Below image: solo OBA research, Haytor Quarry, Dartmoor, 2007)

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid: 157



Rachel Sweeney presenting OBA durational performance, Haytor Quarry, Dartmoor

The above movement tasks can be said to form the physiological testing grounds for developing an *adaptable* and *available* body in site-specific performance. ‘Open Body Actions’ is a shared *ROCKface* performance term, which describes the ability of the performer to equate specific properties within a particular terrain with an equivalent movement sensibility.<sup>268</sup> Open Body Actions can be said to draw on intuitive as well as conscious and informed responses to a particular place. Working in Haytor Quarry on Dartmoor, workshop participants experienced a gradual consensus in their movement to work with repeated and symmetric actions as based on historic associations of industry and human intervention. In particular, it was conceded after experiencing a four hour durational investigation, that such a consensus was possibly influenced by the role of collective cultural memory where in this instance, the granite had been manipulated and shaped by human intervention, in contrast to the Torr regions where the rock formations are shaped by natural weathering processes. Open Body Actions can be described as a performance proposition where the dancer might respond intuitively to the material conditions of the particular landscape through his or her ability to access efficiently those sensory stimuli that are pre-existing in any designated area to enable a dynamic interchange with the landscape to take place. While the previous movement tasks outlined were directed in pairs, Open Body Actions are facilitated as a forum for solo exploration and are developed within a shared durational performance structure lasting between 2 and 6 hours, and are introduced

<sup>268</sup> See *Adaptable Bodies* interview, Appendix Materials



in the final stages of the workshop. In each instance, participants have used their experiences to further develop performance material.

**Physical Synaesthesia**      See Video Link [08.16 –09.35](#)

The final section of my choreographic development is based on a proposition for the visceral gaze, as that which allows for a more proprioceptive viewing stance on the part of the spectator, and was developed as a reflexive critical inquiry into ways of framing site based movement composition, working between camera, landscape and body. I constructed two short explorations of improvisatory works, under the working title ‘Physical Synaesthesia’. I worked with the movement directives below functioning primarily to ‘trip up’ or confuse the body’s normative proprioceptive functions, through a process of ‘physical synaesthesia’.<sup>269</sup> Initial research for the work followed the deliberate mixing up of the proprioceptive faculties which required I experience the particular area of terrain using displaced sensory and kinetic perceptions.

*The fingers are smelling the landscape.*

*The tongue listens to a bird on the opposite hill.*

*The ears can feel the distance between the teeth and the horizon.*

*The mouth is an open orbit, revolving eye.*

*One arm meets the other, exploring its crevices and contours with the objective gaze of an estranged limb.*



Physical Synaesthesia Exercise, Rachel Sweeney

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<sup>269</sup> Synaesthesia: *the production of a sense impression relating to one sense or part of the body by stimulation of another sense or part of the body.* (OED)

I have facilitated this immersive movement task with several groups of both experienced and non experienced dancers and have found it to be one of the most effective in accessing an immediate and imaginative relationship with any given landscape within a short space of time within a confined area. On reflection, the dominant experience produced inclines toward disorientation - a sense of the body's skin being stretched and compressed, and a heightened sense of awareness to the detail of those immediate material objects and textures encountered. In my second solo exploration of 'Physical Synaesthesia' – a self capture - I deliberately chose to invade the frame of the camera by starting and finishing this short piece from behind the actual frame. In such a way, the arms appear to provide a moving frame for the camera at the start of the film, while my legs move towards the camera at the end, creating a close-up which functions to 'close' the frame at the end of the shot. Laura Mulvey's proposal of the 'possessive spectator' informed my decision to challenge conventional proximal relations here between camera and dancer, as I extended my perception of the landscape through distorted means of physical synaesthesia to include the actual camera itself. In doing so, my body did not become separate from the frame, while the presence of the camera was incorporated into the landscape, providing further stimulus for interactive movement.

In his essay 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' (1915), psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud describes the relationship between instinct and stimulus, suggesting how the nervous system operates as:

[...] an apparatus that has the function of getting rid of the stimuli that reach it, or at least reducing them to the lowest possible level. The senses cluster and work at the openings of the body: through their operation we engage in an epistemology of process. Orifices subdivide or experience, yet they are at the same time components of the body's general and synthesising openness to the world.<sup>270</sup>

Where Freud points to the ability of the body to operate individual prioritisation of each of the senses, within the above exercise, the deliberate rearrangement of the sense receptors can be said to enable the body to create or reprogram its own proprioceptive rules, subscribing to Lingis's theory of the body as a self competent organism, capable of activating itself in certain organized ways:

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<sup>270</sup> Freud, S. (1915) 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' in *On Metapsychology* ed. Richards, A.; trans. Strachey, J., Vol 11( Harmondsworth: Pelican Press,1984), 120.

The positions our bodies assume, the gestures they make and the operations they perform are not responses to the objective representation of the material universe elaborated by scientific thought. Our sensory motor organisms respond to the environment as they perceive it. To understand why a spider does not respond to a dead fly put in its web, but crouches and leaps when a vibrating tuning fork of a certain kind touches its web, we have to view the spider not as a material mass reacting to all the forces our physico-chemical representation of the environment identifies, but as an organism capable of activating itself in certain organized ways in response to the range and structure of its environment as its own perception presents that environment.<sup>271</sup>

Such a claim would appear indicative of the capacity of the body to adapt to various conditions based on a re-organisation of its perceptual mechanisms, such as in the case of rationalising the proprioceptive functions within the above choreographic task. In a similar way, physical synaesthesia provides a means to mix up the senses, challenging their normative primary order which favours the visual, and thus sending the regular sensory functions into disarray, creating a division of labour in the body. Such a deliberate reordering has the effect that the head is no longer assumed to be the most important in terms of direction or intent, nor do the eyes control the focus or choose which direction to lead the body. Furthermore, the particular application of physical synaesthesia, in establishing re-programmed sense mechanisms, introduces a virtual presence, through both anticipated sensory awareness and through sense memory, which further implicates Massumi's virtual model above in creating a synthesis between the senses.

One of the main difficulties in attempting a retrospective analysis of my own work throughout this chapter, concerns the question of how to frame and theorise solo practice, within an evolving research process. In examining some of the processes at work in the construction of 'Spilt' I have sought to distil some of the principle methods of choreographic development, working from outdoor sites, through to the crafting of repertoire for studio based performance. These methods have brought together separate individual perspectives, as based on participant responses to a series of movement directives, while also considering related disciplines of geography and ecology working in specified rural sites. German art theorist Hans Borgdoff offers a useful critique of interdisciplinary research processes here:

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<sup>271</sup> Lingis 1994:3

If multidisciplinary research is understood as collaboration between different disciplines, leaving the theoretical premises and working methods of the separate disciplines intact (typical of many art-science collaborations), then the interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary research is characterised by a partial interpenetration of practice, theory and method, in response to research questions arising from highly specific local contexts.

Within the current inquiry, my research has evolved through group facilitation and through participant observer methods, leaning towards a scientific and quantitative survey of some of the phenomenological processes at work in developing movement vocabularies for stage. As such, the structure of this chapter outlines a reverse process, from performance product back to its variant construction processes. I have aimed throughout this chapter to record these practices discursively, accounting for the different registers and time frames in working from site to studio and from page to stage, in an attempt to ground suppositions surrounding the role of the senses in performance. Subsequently, the writing produced here enables each of these separate stages to remain interrelated, in extracting research findings from collective workshop tasks, developing critical writings on the performance process and collating audience feedback. Where practical and theoretical processes remain convergent and adaptive throughout my research, I acknowledge Borgdoff's further implications of the nature of interdisciplinary research processes:

Such trans-disciplinary research is characterised by a relinquishment of the specific (epistemological or aesthetic) foundations of one's own discipline (which were non-existent anyway), a continual adaptation of the recursive research process based on the input from the various fields of activity, and a certain pragmatism and diversity in the choice of concepts and methods.<sup>272</sup>

Finally, by way of developing a critique of phenomenology, I look to the work of contemporary Brazilian choreographer Alejandro Ahmed and his company *Grupo Cena 11* in further endorsing the role of the senses in developing contemporary choreographic languages. Merleau-Ponty, writing on the work of perception in 1969, suggests how:

The theory of body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception. We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it

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<sup>272</sup> Borgdoff, H. 'The Mode of Knowledge Production in Artistic Research' in *Knowledge in Motion: Perspectives of Artistic and Scientific Research in Dance* Tanz Scripte Vol. 9 ed. Brandstetter, G. and Klein, G. (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 76

in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body. In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body and in so far as we perceive the world with our body.<sup>273</sup>

Alphonso Lingis (1995) further highlights Merleau-Ponty's critique on perceptual consciousness in relation to agency where he suggests how perception implies a 'positing of things':

Merleau Ponty's work describes our bodies, not as material objects of nature agitated by stimuli, but as organisms capable of perceiving and activating themselves in organized ways - our bodies as structures of perceptual and behavioural competence. (Lingis 2004:4)

Lingis's debate is further underscored by Luce Irigaray's feminist critique on phenomenology where she suggests that 'perception can establish a link between the reception of a fact exterior to me and an intention towards the world - towards the other'.<sup>274</sup> Developing a physical application of some of these principles, Ahmed and his company *Grupo Cena 11* have developed innovative choreographic methods for the construction of movement repertoire as based on psychologist Frederic Skinner's experiments in 'operant conditioning'. Skinner's work concludes that the live agent (in Ahmed's case, the dancer) is always in the process of operating in the environment; the organism's behaviour is always followed by a consequence, depending on the outcome of which, the operant may or may not repeat such behaviour in the future.<sup>275</sup> Similar to Lingis's definition of the body as an organizing and responsive agent, Greiner cites of Ahmed's work:

While he is developing a movement vocabulary the main objective of the technique is not the systemization of movement patterns but the sensorial process between the instruction and its resultant action. Indeed, this is the physical perception of body movement in the dancer's perception.<sup>276</sup>

In attending to the individual perception of his dancers in interpreting their physical responses to a set of instructions, Ahmed's work is notable in emphasising the individual sensibilities of his dancers over a shared set of aesthetic criteria, using exacting physiological measures. As Greiner further describes of his work ' [...] he was trying to

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<sup>273</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1969: 206

<sup>274</sup> Irigaray, L. *Irigaray: Key Writings* London Continuum, 2004 (page number missing).

<sup>275</sup> Greiner, C. 'Researching Dance in the Wild' in *TDR: The Drama Review* Vol.51 No.3 Fall (2007), p.142.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid:143

explore the singularity of movement organization in each dancer (by) including entropic processes and acknowledging rather than denying the disorder'<sup>277</sup>. Ahmed's sensory choreographic interrogations, similar to those processes of physical synaesthesia outlined above, aim towards developing highly individualised movement vocabularies which place the dancer in a dynamic relation to both the surrounding environment and to those other dancers present. Achieving such heightened awareness has, I believe, potential implications for developing 'sentient bodies' within contemporary choreographic performance, as underscored here by Lepecki's definition "introspective proprioception".<sup>278</sup>

As such, a current investment in some of the above conclusions regarding my own performance making strategies can be summarised in the follows points, each of which are interrelated:

- A study of ethics of engagement between audience performer relations
- Multiplicity as a strategy for performance composition as based on the notion of physical synaesthesia
- A study of the protocols of improvisation in performance: questions of performance agency and an examination of the scene of decision making.

In aiming to situate the body as an interface between empirical experimentation processes and the interpretation and application of these findings through diverse research methods, the current research project has enabled me to generate an embedded perspective on the subject of butoh performance, which is not ethnographic, but situates me within a pedagogic as well as an autonomous relation with my subject matter in aligning a cross disciplinary engagement into stated choreographic research areas. While the structure of the accompanying DVD follows a clear chronological development from product back to process, it reflects also a wider shift of register from a receiver of a set of movement principles and criteria embedded within a complex cultural agenda, towards adapting and translating these principles within my own choreographic and pedagogic development as an independent performance practitioner.

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid

<sup>278</sup> See p. 100 of the current writing project.

## CONCLUSION

Butoh has accomplished a reversal in the aesthetic consciousness.<sup>279</sup>

Butoh – as complex practice and associated discourses - describes at all times the split between outer and inner realities. The embodiment of a series of images is manifest throughout a process of transformation into a whole repertoire of movements, where images colonise the body just as the body colonises words. In opposition to lyrical movement expression, butoh pollutes the stage and invests every moment of movement by insisting on an intensity of bodily expression and sensation that is contractually bound within the material conditions of body, image and form without recourse to a gestural idiom.

I propose to return now to my original proposition, which was that the body in contemporary performance resides within the domain of the ‘dysfunctional’, a widely held trope critiqued by Birringer (1998) in multimedia practices, Foster (1996) in dance, Lepecki (2000) in choreography and Phelan (1993) in contemporary performance culture as a whole. My mapping of this term onto the non-kinetic, dispersed and fragmented body of butoh reflects not only a historic and socially constructed schema, as ascribed to butoh’s ‘variegated genealogy’<sup>280</sup>, but is also housed within a distinct choreographic sensibility cultivated by the butoh performer, to which I ascribe the term ‘physical synaesthesia’, and which can be seen to challenge the symmetric, harmonious and kinaesthetically ordered body of western theatrical dance, as underscored historically by ballet. An extended study of butoh thus raises ethical and epistemological queries regarding choreography’s ontological status. While the disciplined and cultivated body of contemporary western theatrical dance has evolved its own receptor strategies through, arguably, an oversubscription to spectator theories and linguistic mechanisms, an attempt to position butoh as an autonomous and existential theatrical movement expression might begin by negating some of the following claims, which are further contested below:

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<sup>279</sup> Kuniyoshi 1989:7

<sup>280</sup> Ibid:1

- Butoh is descriptive *not* prescriptive.

Chapter One points to certain similarities between mime and butoh practices, both of which are dependent on internal imagistic processes and their externalised representation, articulated in physical form. However, the butoh performer does not allude to distinct emotional or humanistic movement states, but rather animates forms in the body through a phantasmagorical parade of mineral, animal and elemental matter. The distinctiveness of watching butoh is upheld by the particular ability of the butoh performer to split focus always maintaining an objective handling of his/her own anatomy (Hijitkata's objective body) while directing the audience's engagement toward those tensions and counter tensions that exist in the dialogue sustained between internal and external movement processes.

- Butoh is not a therapeutic dance expression<sup>281</sup>

While butoh can be described a somatic practice, the relationship of sensation, word, memory and physical expression is motivated towards the crafting of a communicative performance expression rather than a form of remedial treatment. Equally, converse to the introspective proprioceptive methods used within a range of somatic movement practices<sup>282</sup> butoh sustains at all times an awareness of the split between internalised somatic processes and the external presentation of animate forms for performance purposes. Philip Zarrilli's notion of the 'body-mind aesthetic' (Zarrilli 2004) twinned with the notion of aesthetic consciousness in butoh further endorses this claim.

- Butoh performance does not necessarily imply moving slowly

While slowness and stillness can be regarded as choreographic strategies which discredit the historically sanctioned 'plots' of watching by destabilising the spectator position (Lepecki 1996), butoh performances evolve within a distinctive temporal spatial framework in which I argue, a more visceral gaze might be established on the part of its audiences, effecting a reflective and reciprocal visual engagement in *allowing us to do a further seeing*.

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<sup>281</sup> This notion is given closer consideration in an interview with Body Weather practitioner Marnie Orr. Please see Appendix materials 'Adaptable Bodies' interview.

<sup>282</sup> In addition to therapeutic dance, I refer here to internalized movement processes found within Contact Improvisation, Body Mind Centering and Alexander technique.



- Butoh is not a culturally specific dance expression

Butoh both embodies and rejects its cultural heritage. While there is arguably a discernable aesthetic contained in the body of second generation Japanese butoh artists, directly cultivated through the shared language and choreographic sensibility of Hijikata's teachings and fostered within the singular context of the communal training and performance spaces, to pursue a pathway in butoh training practices today, one must account for the fundamental evolution of butoh surrounding its geographic export in the late 1980s and, with it, the assimilation of a range of climatic, social and cultural sensibilities. As such, the current research project is not steered by an inquiry into the terms 'authenticity' and 'appropriation' within butoh, but rather offers a self-reflexive critical engagement which views the body in butoh as a site on which certain cultural emplacements and 'bodily plots' (White 2001) can be interrogated.

The structure of the current writing project is thus underlined to reflect four distinct approaches to butoh:

1. A study of the relation of image, word and movement in butoh, through the historic lens of writing processes surrounding dancing.
2. Butoh's relation to contemporary training praxis.
3. Butoh's ontological challenge to choreography and dance spectatorship.
4. Distillation and translation of certain butoh and Body Weather principles towards interdisciplinary site-based choreographic research.

I believe that the outcome of the current research project is manifold in highlighting the application of butoh within contemporary movement praxis through a range of pedagogic and performance related contexts. As I suggest at the start of this thesis, over the past forty years butoh has achieved recognition on western theatrical stages mainly through its visual impact. However, those training methods, evolving languages, collaborative initiatives and performance philosophies pertinent to butoh have, for the most part, been refined to practical undertakings, while published resources remain arguably thin, pertaining mainly to ethnographic led debates. Throughout the research I have attempted to evolve a shared understanding of methods, terminology and vocabularies across disciplines, which I hope might encourage further cross-fertilisation of research practices between dance and the new

sciences, and between different dance disciplines. Equally, I have attributed to butoh's performance ethos a synthesis between internalised, somatic processes in dance and their externalisation through choreographic form, citing the role of physical consciousness as a continuous dialogue between movement, sensation, image and form. While Chapters Two and Four have aimed to provide an embedded perspective in butoh training and performance, practical choreographic research cited here does not suggest a direct alignment with butoh, be it cultural, somatic or performative. Rather than attempt a translation of any singular directive within butoh production or pedagogy, the practices recorded and included in this research document should have served to highlight the transmission and application of a series of principles underlying butoh, which I summarise here:

### **Butoh as a provocation**

Butoh, of course, was never a fixed or established mode of expression. Its actual existence was in the imprint left by the potent ideas of Tatsumi Hijikata. But the authenticity of butoh springs from its rejection of completion and stability, making finished form, to the extent that it is genuine butoh, an impossibility.<sup>283</sup>

While I have given some consideration to Hijikata's own performance methods, in particular in relation to his collaborations with visual media in Chapter Three, the focus remains on the particular relation between word, image and movement, as cultivated in the butoh body within a range of sensibilities that are applied here in the context of stage, studio and site-based movement performance and research. In addition, where I have chosen to apply an investigation of this relationship within my own choreographic work, as to my individual appropriation and distillation of a range of butoh training approaches, I uphold Hijikata's claim that 'there is no philosophy that surrounds butoh. It is only possible that a philosophy may come out of butoh'<sup>284</sup>.

As I suggested in the introductory section of this dissertation, part of the difficulty of researching butoh is found in its relatively short tradition, following Hijikata's death in 1986 at the age of fifty-seven, where his disciples were forced to seek new directives within Europe and America. It should be noted thus, that prior to gaining international credibility,

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<sup>283</sup> Kuniyoshi 1989:4

<sup>284</sup> Ibid

appearing on stages across the west in the 1980s, butoh was regarded as a subversive and underground movement expression in Japan. Many of the founder members of Hijikata's company made work in highly compromised surrounds, often ostracised from their families, living and training communally, funding their performance activities through collective earnings from dancing in strip clubs<sup>285</sup>. Together these borderline activities and the discipleship implied marked a particular performance ethos as well a performance mode that might well not be easily transferred to other performance-making contexts, as Fraleigh concludes:

Butoh is not the product of a single event, nor can it be reasoned through a single social lens; it can be explained less reductively as a form of dance experience and a social movement [....].<sup>286</sup>

Hijikata's own legacy is written into a stream of visceral prosaic accounts that, though arguably lost in translation, bear the unmistakable marks of physical immediacy, where thought, movement, word and image are in constant dialogue. Elsewhere, according to Fraleigh,

His writings are alive with images, embodied nonsense, and onomatopoeia, ringing with actions that sound like they feel in the body. Like his dances, raw and unfinished, his writings are somatically derived from the body, and open to interpretation.<sup>287</sup>

My decision to spear an investigation into butoh through an examination of the role of physical consciousness follows my observation that cultural and performance theories surrounding butoh have been oversubscribed to within spectator discourses in western contemporary performance theories. As we have seen above, such an emphasis on butoh's representational value in performance in the west has raised the question of accessibility. Where butoh can be seen to develop in Japan within small ensembles during the 1960s – 1980s, following its dispersal in the late eighties, second generation butoh artists have sought to follow different performance pathways away from Japan, blending first generation butoh traditions as established through Hijikata's legacy with other somatic practices and performance media (Fraleigh 2006). Subsequently, as I have argued in the body of this study, while many third generation butoh artists may have followed

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<sup>285</sup> Fraleigh 2006:22

<sup>286</sup> Ibid:74

<sup>287</sup> Ibid:43

autonomous decisions in choosing to undergo mentorships with particular Japanese butoh artists, a pedagogical assessment of butoh in the west today is mostly confined to short teaching intensives such as weekend workshops or summer training programs. The development of butoh from its roots in communal training cultures towards a universal dissemination in the form of international symposia, workshops and training programs is representative of a wider shift in both eastern and western performance training practices. Here, the ethos and the appeal of individualised and idiosyncratic expert disciplinary practices can be seen to have lost favour in contrast with informal mentoring programs, interdisciplinary and collaborative research methods and hybridised training approaches as illustrated within formal higher education mixed mode Performing Arts courses as well as through individual directives.

What I have suggested throughout this study, then, is that it is on this basis that it can be argued that butoh's widely-disseminated and indeed dissipated lineage has resulted in a current split between training and production purposes. On the one hand, butoh has become synonymous with certain directions taken in a range of western somatic practices, where it provides a holistic presentation of the dance body as operating within – curiously enough - an ecological framework. However, while second generation butoh artists such as Akira Kasai apply certain butoh principles towards therapeutic ends in their work, I have judged it important, in this study, to distinguish between movement for experiential purposes – feeding into the performer's sense of being - and its production as valid choreographic material, where the latter is validated within established performance conventions. On the other hand, as I have suggested above, only to focus on an application of butoh within training would be to omit – or to erase - a large part of its history and impact, where butoh remains firmly rooted within a radical and subversive performance act. At the same time, as I have equally suggested in the body of this study, butoh's appearance on western stages can be seen to occupy a set of established aesthetic criteria which remain culturally rigid, subscribing to Kuniyoshi's claim regarding 'the tendency among some dance groups to mount overblown showpieces constructed from deliberately Japanese materials in order to ensure the success of their overseas productions [...]'.<sup>288</sup> Where butoh is introduced within the context of International Festivals, audience access can remain similarly restricted,

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<sup>288</sup> Kuniyoshi 1989:2

endorsing what Ohnuki-Tierney has identified as ‘anthropological abstractions’<sup>289</sup>. Katsura Kan’s recent choreographed performance ‘Fragments of Adam’<sup>290</sup> employs three non-Japanese dancers who appear to undergo a double inversion of Kuniyoshi’s ‘eastern exoticism’ where all three females can be seen to appropriate fetishistic and eroticised displays of ‘Japonisme’ which sits uncomfortably on top of a highly exuberant and sexually charged choreography by three classically trained dancers of Spanish, Israeli and Euro-Asian descent. Similarly, in the case of Tomoe Shizune’s performance at the Dublin International Theatre festival (2002), mistranslation impacted directly upon certain preconceptions throughout an audience feedback session which directly succeeded the performance, resulting in the widespread misconception of butoh here as form of a traditional Japanese folk dance.<sup>291</sup> Such unfortunate examples would appear to endorse Kuniyoshi’s claim that

The way all forms of contemporary dance in Japan, including creative ballet, use exoticism when seeking international recognition can only leave the impression that Japanese culture stopped somewhere in the Edo period, and to the extent that Japan continues to trade in exoticism it must be regarded as still among the backward nations.<sup>292</sup>

My major observation, emerging from the ‘mixed-mode’ study recorded here, is that butoh might best be described as a performance provocation on today’s dance theatre stage. As we have seen from Lepecki’s allusion to the dysfunctional in dance, he asserts of contemporary dance theatre practices that choreography’s ontological status might best be challenged through negative bodily actions<sup>293</sup> that can be seen to mark a departure from romantic ritualised courtship displays toward a blurring of post industrial motor efficiency and universality in favour of pedantic pedestrian prose and deliberate inarticulacy. Such diversions can be regarded as an attempt to strip dance down to a pure embodiment of

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<sup>289</sup> Ohnuki-Tierney, E. *Illness and culture in contemporary Japan* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>290</sup> I attended this performance plus a post-show audience discussion at the Daiwa Anglo Butoh Festival, London 2007.

<sup>291</sup> Here, the unfortunate combination of the solo performer’s explanations, poorly relayed by a local Irish-Japanese translator who had clearly little to no prior understanding of butoh and whose grasp of Japanese dance culture - it transpired through the course of her explanations - was limited to Kabuki, resulted in leaving the audience widely misinformed that they had in fact just witnessed Japanese traditional folk dance.

<sup>292</sup> Kuniyoshi 1989:2 Kuniyoshi refers here also to large scale companies such as Sankai Juku, who’s zen-like ceremonial works rely heavily on sophisticated set designs and highly technological stage management, radically contrasting from Hijikata’s earlier stage performances.

<sup>293</sup> I refer here to a genre of current postmodern dance work, represented in current choreographic works of Jerome Bel, La Ribot, Xavier le Roy and Wendy Houston, to name but a few.

thought. However, my suggestion here is that much of those current physical languages that probe the space of cultural discourse surrounding the body's representation on stage remain scientific and pejorative, still subscribing to a post-modern intervention into dance by deliberately negating the body's energetic causality in favour of repeating its well worn challenge to presence, spectacle and virtuosity.<sup>294</sup>

As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, the body in contemporary performance has become increasingly scrutinised and dissected, oversubscribed to by what I identify metaphorically as a 'calcified gaze' (Lepecki 1996), where we live 'with an increasing instantaneousness in the circulation of capital and goods, we experience an increasing difficulty with the circulation of bodies in the 'market'.'<sup>295</sup> A recent international performance symposium entitled 'The Anatomical Theatre Revisited'<sup>296</sup> suggested fertile grounds within the current climate of contemporary dance theatre, to return the body in performance to its initial place as an object of fascination and repulsion, to be examined and dissected according to our need to display its meaning. Dutch artist Van Hagens has developed this metaphor literally: his plastinated anatomical displays reside within the domain of contemporary visual arts, further evidence that we are returning to a morbid fascination with the body as spectacle. As one performance theorist announced:

*Question:* What is the difference between an exhibitionist and a body donor?

*Answer:* The altruistic motivation of the body donor.<sup>297</sup>

Thus, not altogether differently from the poststructuralist project in literature, the instructed and cultivated body in contemporary theatrical dance must engage in a politics of dispersal, offering multiplicitous sites of resistance while engaging the whole senses of its audience through distilled and highly sensitised perceptual nodes. In such a way we can begin to articulate a sentient, available, multilingual communicant on stage, very much present, and re-emergent. The holographic body appears and reappears in butoh as emergent, permeable, multifarious, where "each movement retains the strength to engender another"<sup>298</sup>. On the basis of these sorts of observations, as we have seen in the present study, 'the body',

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<sup>294</sup> I refer here to Yvonne Rainer's widely held postmodern decree for dance, 'Manifesto for Trio A'.

<sup>295</sup> Lepecki, A. *Embracing the Stain: Notes on the Time of Dance*, in *Performance Research*; Routledge, 1996:107.

<sup>296</sup> International Performance Symposium, Amsterdam School of Arts, April 2006.

<sup>297</sup> Loveless, N. speaking at 'The Anatomical Body Revisited' symposium, Amsterdam, 2006.

<sup>298</sup> Franko 1995:8

despite the nominalization of the term, is not passive matter, waiting to be shaped by logos' articulating form<sup>299</sup>. Rather, it is invested with physical thoughts of its own making, where energy and image eclipse each other, transpiring towards meaning-production in those slippages that appear between the body's surfaces, its internal anatomy and the charged and breathing spaces surrounding it.

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<sup>299</sup> Shaviro 1993:257

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## APPENDIX

### *Adaptable Bodies*

Interview with Marnie Orr, London, November 2007

*Marnie Orr is a Body Weather practitioner and MA student at Middlesex through the Work Based Learning Dept. She currently lives and works in South West Australia, where she runs NavLab - an interdisciplinary research project, looking at ecological, geographical and architectural histories in relation to site based Body Weather training. The following conversation attempts to chart some of our respective independent training experiences in Body Weather and Butoh, while reflecting on the shared working methods as generated through our research collective ROCKface and also INVIVO, a collaborative choreographic research forum which Marnie co-facilitates.*



### *Receptive States*

**R:** Can we start with you telling me a little bit about Body Weather and your experience of it, through the second generation Tess de Quincey / Stuart Lynch lineage?

**M:** I was first introduced to Body Weather in 1998 in Cairns, Queensland through Leah Grycewicz. This was at a point when I had been working extensively with skill-based circus performance practice centring on object manipulation and public performance intervention work. Following an invitation to participate in a Body Weather Intensive lead by Tess de Quincey in Sydney I decided to move to Sydney to become a founding dancer in de Quincey's dance company where I continued training and performing full time for two years under Tess's guidance, alongside Stuart Lynch<sup>300</sup>.

**R:** Both Butoh and Body Weather, as relatively new traditions which have spread during the past fifty years from their respective cultural roots in Japan to Europe and the States, can be seen to have to contend with issues surrounding *translation* and *appropriation*. While both dance forms share an underlying philosophy towards the body, as well as certain principles of movement, there is a clearly a separation of purpose. Whereas Butoh might be described as, essentially, a performance expression, tied into a cultural aesthetic, Body Weather, it seems, has been cultivated directly out of the conditions of a particular cultural landscape – Min Tanaka's development of the form was intrinsically linked to the natural conditions of the Japanese landscape. Do you think that as a form Body Weather contains a performance expression, or is it better described as a holistic training system - or both?

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<sup>300</sup> Both Lynch and De Quincey were formative members of Mai Juku, Min Tanaka's Bodyweather company in Japan during the 1980s. Lynch now lives and works in Denmark where he teaches Bodyweather workshops and is a freelance independent theatre director.



**M:** Although Body Weather was founded by a butoh dancer (Min Tanaka), it is foundational that Body Weather is training for creative movement that is not culturally specific or aesthetically based. Thus, whether Body Weather is essentially a performance making tool, a holistic body and mind training or a philosophy remains topical, and differs in its explanation and application between practitioners. That is, Body Weather could be considered a broad spectrum body and mind training, of which *one* of its applications is performance training.



**R:** There are, of course, ethical implications working within an oral /perceptive transmission process which does not have an established set of criteria. You could argue, that as neither Body Weather nor Butoh can be considered form based movement disciplines, their systematic understanding is reliant on the transference from one body directly to another, which brings in the question of individual interpretation. I understand that, for example, Min Tanaka decided to suspend his open Body Weather training camps at his farm in Japan for several years as he felt that students were coming to learn and immerse themselves in a physical training process, then taking their experiences of training and quickly disseminating the practice, without really developing a clear understanding of it in their own bodies.

**M:** While Body Weather has been developed by many practitioners in different ways, only a small pocket of literature exists on the discipline. I have come to understand that one clear principle of Body Weather practice is based upon open communication between practitioners. Certainly, this has to some extent, discounted the professionalism and depth of Body Weather knowledge. I believe that some notion of screening is essential in order to maintain a practice of integrity.

**R:** So, could you talk a little about your transition from, if you like, a student and receiver of an established set of training principles, through Tess's training and your evolution as an independent dance practitioner and workshop facilitator in relation to our shared process, through the work of *ROCKface*?

**M:** While my practice has developed strongly through facilitating Body Weather training in London for the past four years, the advent of independent movement/performance research outfits *InVivo* (2007) and *ROCKface* (2005) have perhaps been the most fundamental to developing an independent language, which has come about through an interrogation of some of the basic principles of Body Weather. There is a kind of deconstruction of the form which is necessary in order to then construct my - or, in the case of *ROCKface*, our - language.

**R:** It occurs to me that both Body Weather and Butoh as emergent practices, *do* require material evidence in the form of identified terms of engagement- hence our continued investigation, through *ROCKface* into the development of a language - a set of definitions, or performance vocabulary, that can be used to define the body's relation to the particular landscape or environment. Certainly, the initial construction of a physical language within *ROCKface* is shaped directly out of the conditions of the landscape we have inhabited - namely, Dartmoor National Park. Our challenge within the research is how to sustain a movement vocabulary beyond its initiation within a particular environment, working

in an immersive experiential mode. And through corporeal memory - a kind of muscular articulateness which eventually becomes embedded *through* the training. Does any of this resonate with the work you were doing with *INVIVO*?



**M:** In *INVIVO* we are a diverse mix of Polish, Italian, Brazilian and Australian, so everything requires translation and a distillation of language at some level. I never used words like density, weight, mass, volume, gravity, I use only the words to do with *immediacy* – speed, length, distance (words close to the image) – those properties are tiered in terms of being accessible to an open or ‘available’ body – definitely speed is the first thing that we can grasp but it’s also the first thing to go, when we are trying to get deeper in terms of being able to match properties. It’s not about matching something else. In order to work as agents – we can draw on what we already know – walking, running, jogging... The other thing I was working with was opposing forces that co-exist in order to be there – for example, gravity doesn’t exist by itself. We don’t get around like amoebas - we hold ourselves at some level. And that is the agency – being able to extend that agency to hold your foot down on the ground while you are doing the circles, and having your roots down on the ground. The input matches the output.

**R:** Then, it is about a division of labour in the body – how you are able to stabilise your left arm in order to maintain a grounded left heel – instead of going with the supposed intention of kinetic organised or ordered logic. However, it is more than simply an efficient division of labour when you are working in relation to an unstable environment. How to find a dynamic interchange with the situation you find yourself in.

**M:** Initially the MB work assists in terms of trying to be open in the activities is that first level of understanding of re-creating speed - the pedestrian walking body working at different speeds – working *against* the anatomy of the body. Again, identifying this openness then enables us to transform our perception of the limits of our anatomical structure in relation to constantly changing environments. Yet, in order to be able to transform you have to be able change both your relationship to your environment and change your relationship with yourself. We tend to view this in terms of a loss of power - not in a negative way – just giving something up. And that’s about as far as the work goes in relation to psychology – because it doesn’t matter what it is - if you can give it up it is no longer an issue. It’s a question of blurred boundaries because I am suggesting we can adapt all the time according to the needs or appropriateness of the situation. Because I feel that that is where transformation lies.

**R:** Exactly- you’ve just put your finger on the difference between this work and many somatic based education methods – here, there is a sense of intuitive anatomy– where transformation also demands an alteration of our perception of what the body is. The aim of the training then is towards developing an *adaptable and available body* – in order to be able to access the sensorial stimuli in any pre-existing properties of an environment – and change your relation to your environment – and in doing so, your relationship to yourself. I do think the application isn’t as relevant actually. Rather than an available body we are talking about an adaptable body.

**M:** In some sense then, the aim of the MB work is to create an open body as this is a pre-requisite to developing an *adaptable body*. An adaptable body is the body as a *constantly transforming entity* – like the weather. The application of this can equally be in fact daily life as in the creative process.

